

Netherlands

Enide Perez and Stéphanie Heinerman

Sjöcrona Van Stigt Advocaten

Domestic legislation

1 Identify and describe your jurisdiction's laws, regulations, professional rules and doctrines that protect communications between an attorney and a client from disclosure.

In the Netherlands, the confidentiality and thus the protection of client-attorney communications has its basis in the Counsel Act and the Rules of Professional Conduct 1992. Article 10a paragraph 1 under e of the Counsel Act provides that the attorney is a confidential adviser who must maintain confidentiality within legal limits. Article 11a paragraph 1 and 2 of the Counsel Act provide that the attorney must maintain confidentiality with regard to all information that is entrusted to him or her in his or her professional capacity. This obligation of confidentiality also applies to the law firm's staff members and continues to exist after termination of the professional activity of the attorney.

Rules 6 and 10 of the Rules of Professional Conduct 1992 also stipulate that the attorney is obliged to maintain confidentiality with regard to all information about his or her clients and the cases he or she has conducted, regardless of how this information was shared or of who shared this information. Furthermore, the attorney has his or her own responsibility with regard to maintaining confidentiality, even if the client should discharge the attorney of the obligation to do so.

Violation of the obligation to maintain confidentiality may lead to disciplinary sanctions (article 46 of the Counsel Act), and the attorney who intentionally violates this obligation is also liable to prosecution (article 272 of the Dutch Criminal Code).

In connection with the obligation of confidentiality, in most circumstances the attorney in the Netherlands has the right to not give information and to not testify regarding information in cases in which he or she acts as an attorney. The aforementioned information includes client-attorney communications.

The most relevant Dutch legislation protecting client-attorney communications from disclosure is to be found in article 165 of the Code of Civil Procedure; articles 218, 96a, 96c, 98, 104, 105 and 110 of the Code of Criminal Procedure; article 8(33) of the General Administrative Law Act; and article 53a of the State Taxes Act.

Pursuant to article 165 of the Code of Civil Procedure, a person called as a witness is obliged to appear and give evidence. However, if that person is required by virtue of their profession to maintain confidentiality, he or she may refuse to testify in relation to information received in his or her professional capacity.

Article 218 of the Code of Criminal Procedure gives the attorney the right to refrain from giving evidence and from answering questions in relation to information that he or she received in his or her professional capacity.

Articles 96a paragraph 3 under b and 105 paragraph 3 of the Code of Criminal Procedure offer, with reference to article 218 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, protection when the investigating authorities or the investigating judge give an order to hand over documents, including client-attorney communications. These provisions determine that the attorney does not have to comply with such an order.

Article 96c paragraph 1 and article 110 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provide that a law firm cannot be searched by a prosecutor, only by an investigating judge.

Article 98 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that communications and other documents that fall within the scope of client-attorney

confidentiality can only be seized at the attorney's office with his or her permission. Furthermore, it is provided that a law firm can only be searched if the search is conducted without violation of the professional legal privilege and is limited to certain documents: *corpora et instrumenta delicti*. See question 6.

2 Describe any relevant differences in your jurisdiction between the status of private practitioners and in-house counsel, in terms of protections for attorney-client communications.

Article 5(9) paragraph g of the Legal Profession Regulations provides that attorneys can work in employment with a company or organisation and only practise law on behalf of that company or organisation.

In-house counsel, as referred to above, are qualified practising lawyers admitted to the Netherlands Bar. They are required, by rules under the Netherlands Bar (article 5(12) of the Legal Profession Regulations), to sign contracts with their employers and clients guaranteeing their independence.

Dutch in-house lawyers have always been considered to fall under standard legislation concerning attorney-client privilege, as set out in question 1.

The judgment of the European Court of Justice in *Akzo Nobel Chemicals Ltd and Akros Chemical Ltd v Commission of the European Communities* (ECJ 14 September 2010, ECLI:EU:C:2010:512) created temporary uncertainty in the Netherlands about whether or not in-house counsel could invoke attorney-client privilege. According to the European Court of Justice, an in-house attorney's economic dependence on, and close ties with, the employer means that in-house attorneys do not enjoy the same level of professional independence as outside attorneys, and that based on those characteristics in-house counsel's legal privilege was limited to exchanges with external attorneys. However, in 2013, the Dutch Supreme Court took away this uncertainty by considering that the aforementioned judgment of the European Court of Justice is applicable to EU competition law and not necessarily to (competition) law outside this scope. The Supreme Court further considered that in the Netherlands the independent law practice of in-house counsel is regulated under the rules of the Netherlands Bar, and therefore saw no reason to deny professional legal privilege to in-house counsel solely on the ground that in-house counsel work in employment (Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 15 March 2013, ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BY6101).

Following this judgment of the Dutch Supreme Court, in-house counsel can invoke professional legal privilege; in the same situations outside attorneys can invoke privilege. Professional legal privilege does not apply to company lawyers who are not admitted to the Netherlands Bar.

3 Identify and describe your jurisdiction's laws, regulations, professional rules and doctrines that provide protection from disclosure of tangible material created in anticipation of litigation.

The Netherlands does not have a separate concept of litigation privilege, or a work product doctrine where protection from disclosure is concerned. Documents created in anticipation of litigation fall within the scope of legal privilege on the grounds that an attorney and his or her client have a right to prepare for proceedings in confidence. Legal privilege extends to all the information that is shared with the attorney in his or her professional capacity.

4 Identify and summarise recent landmark decisions involving attorney–client communications and work product.

The most important landmark decisions are not very recent. In *Notaris Maas* ('Civil law notary Maas'; Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 1 March 1985, ECLI:NL:HR:1985:AC9066), the Supreme Court considered that professional legal privilege can only be invoked if the information concerned was shared with the professional because of the client's need to gain professional advice and support. The legal privilege extends to all information that is entrusted, without any distinction as to the degree of confidentiality; information is either confidential or it is not. If the client discharges the attorney of the obligation to maintain confidentiality, the attorney nevertheless has his or her own duty to observe secrecy. In subsequent judgments, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the scope of the professional legal privilege as set out in the *Notaris Maas* case (for example Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 29 June 2004, ECLI:NL:HR:2004:AO5070 and 24 January 2006, ECLI:NL:PHR:2006:AU4666).

The Supreme Court furthermore established that exceptional circumstances can lead to the search for truth prevailing over the professional legal privilege. These exceptional circumstances may, for example, appear in situations where an attorney is being suspected of a serious criminal offence, or when there is a real risk of a serious crime (of violence) taking place that could be prevented by disclosure of the confidential information. In those cases, the breach of legal privilege must not go beyond what is strictly necessary to reveal the truth, and information that can be obtained otherwise should be left aside. Care should also be taken to ensure that the interests of other clients of the attorney are not disproportionately affected (Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 22 November 1991, ECLI:NL:HR:1991:ZCo422 and Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 30 November 1999, ECLI:NL:HR:2002:AO5297).

Also see questions 5 and 9.

Attorney–client communications

5 Describe the elements necessary to confer protection over attorney–client communications.

In principle, all communications between an attorney and a client are protected by legal privilege, if the attorney acts in his or her professional capacity. It does not make a difference whether the communication is from client to attorney or from attorney to client. It also does not make a difference where the communications are kept or where they can be found.

Recently, the debate regarding whether or not factual material (as opposed to legal advice) falls within the scope of the legal privilege received a new lease of life as a result of the Hague District Court's interlocutory judgment of 14 January 2015. The Court stated that the law firm's governance report about a housing corporation, that only contained factual findings and no legal findings, qualifications or conclusions, was not a confidential, internal and advisory document about the corporation's position in legal proceedings, and consequently did not fall within the scope of legal privilege. The Court decided that the report had to be handed over to the defendants in the procedure. A relevant consideration of the Court with regard to this decision was that the report had been given to the defendants in draft form at an earlier stage, and a reservation had been made that the report could be shared with the relevant authorities.

The Netherlands Bar criticised this decision, stating that professional legal privilege also applies to facts when factual research is done within the scope of legal assistance and advice.

6 Describe any limitations on the contexts in which the protections for attorney–client communications are recognised.

As indicated above, it is important that the information is entrusted to the attorney (or the attorney communicates with his or her client) because of the attorney's professional capacity; the information thus falls within the scope of receiving or giving advice, support or representation. Information shared outside the professional capacity of the attorney does not fall within the scope of legal privilege.

Article 98 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides for a legal exception to professional legal privilege: documents that are clearly the object of, or have contributed to the commission of a criminal offence (*corpora et instrumenta delicti*) do not fall within the scope of legal privilege.

In case law that has existed since 1991, the Supreme Court furthermore established that exceptional circumstances can lead to the search for truth prevailing over the professional legal privilege. These exceptional

circumstances may, for example, appear in situations where an attorney is being suspected of a serious criminal offence or when there is a real risk of a serious crime (of violence) taking place that could be prevented by disclosure of the confidential information (see question 4). See, for example, Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 22 November 1991, ECLI:NL:HR:1991:ZCo422 and Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 5 July 2011, ECLI:NL:PHR:2011:BP6141.

Moreover, since the entry into force of the Dutch Prevention of Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism Act in 2008 (based on Directive 2005/60/EC), service providers, including attorneys, are obliged to notify authorities when unusual financial transactions are encountered. Attorneys only fall under the scope of this law when they give advice or assistance in: buying or selling real estate; administering financing or valuables; incorporating or managing companies; buying, selling or acquiring companies; and activities of a fiscal nature.

7 In your jurisdiction, do the protections for attorney–client communications belong to the client, or is secrecy a duty incumbent on the attorney?

The secrecy is a duty incumbent on the attorney and it is the attorney who decides whether or not legal privilege applies. Even if the client relinquishes the confidentiality of the information, the attorney has an independent duty to weigh whether or not he or she should preserve the confidentiality of the information.

Consequent to the aforementioned, if an attorney should hire an expert in a certain case, to render advice to the attorney regarding his or her specific field of expertise, it is the attorney and not the expert who should decide whether or not the right to legal privilege applies to documents and communications that the expert has possession of in connection with this assignment.

It is standard procedure that attorney–client documents that are found during a search or seizure either at a law firm or at the location of a third party are sealed by the investigating judge, in order to enable the attorney in question to share his or her point of view with regard to the privileged nature of the documents, before the investigating officers can take a look at them. The investigating judge decides, preferably after consultation with the dean of the local bar association, whether – as the Supreme Court has phrased it and is now established case law – there is no reasonable doubt about the attorney's standpoint being incorrect (ECLI:NL:HR:2010:BJ9262). If it is necessary for the investigating judge to take note of the communications to come to a decision, he or she may do so to a certain extent (Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 22 December 2015, ECLI:NL:HR:2015:3714). The attorney can file a written complaint against the examining judge's decision within 14 days.

8 To what extent are the facts communicated between an attorney and a client protected, as opposed to the attorney–client communication itself?

The basic criterion is that all information that is entrusted to an attorney in his or her professional capacity is protected (see question 1). Therefore, this should also concern facts that are communicated between an attorney and a client.

However, the Hague District Court gave an interim judgment on 14 January 2015 in which it decided that a governance report from a law firm containing only factual findings did not fall within the scope of legal privilege. It is not yet clear whether this decision will be appealed. It is also unclear whether higher courts will uphold this decision. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Court also took into consideration that the report had been given to the defendants in draft form at an earlier stage, and a reservation had been made that the report could be shared with the relevant authorities. (see question 5).

9 In what circumstances do communications with agents of the attorney or agents of the client fall within the scope of the protections for attorney–client communications?

Case law stipulates that third parties that are assigned by the attorney to give the defence (expert) advice on matters that are related to the legal issue at hand can claim a derived privilege for all communications with the attorney that concern the matter for which the third party is engaged (Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 29 March 1994 and 12 February 2002, ECLI:NL:HR:2002:AD4402).

In line with growing concerns among several authorities about misuse of the legal privilege, the Supreme Court decided on 26 January 2016 that

the mere fact that communications between a third person and a client are sent in carbon copy to a professional trusted with privileged information will not automatically mean that legal privilege can be invoked. In these situations, it remains necessary that the information be shared with the attorney to obtain or receive legal advice (Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 26 January 2016, ECLI:NL:HR:2016:110).

10 Can a corporation avail itself of the protections for attorney-client communications? Who controls the protections on behalf of the corporation?

Yes, that is possible. The same protections for attorney-client communications apply for a corporation (being the client) as for an individual.

11 Do the protections for attorney-client communications extend to communications between employees and outside counsel?

When employees work at a corporation that has an attorney-client relationship with outside counsel, a convincing argument can be made that all communications between employees and outside counsel fall under the scope of legal privilege, as long as the information is shared in the context of the professional capacity of the outside attorney in the specific matter. To our knowledge, this is normal practice.

12 Do the protections for attorney-client communications extend to communications between employees and in-house counsel?

In-house counsel can refuse to give information on the basis of their professional legal privilege in the same way that outside attorneys can invoke this privilege. For further information see question 2. Therefore, as is the case for outside counsel, a convincing argument can be made that the protections for attorney-client communications extend to communications between employees and in-house counsel, as long as the communication is exchanged in the context of the professional capacity of the in-house attorney as the corporation's attorney. Employees should be aware that counsel does not act as their personal counsel and does not have a client-attorney privilege with regard to 'personal' communications between them.

13 To what degree do the protections for attorney-client communications extend to communications between counsel for the company and former employees?

When employees are no longer in the employment of a company that has an attorney-client relationship with counsel, then it can be said that former employees are no longer part of the company and therefore no longer connected to the client. However, the attorney-client privilege extends to all confidential information exchanged in the past. Furthermore, the standpoint could be taken that former employees could (from the moment they cease to be employees) be considered as third parties (see question 9). Information that is shared between a third party and an attorney falls under the scope of legal privilege if the information shared is used to prepare advice considered necessary or important for the defence. It is advisable to put down in writing the engagement between the third party and the attorney, and the reason why the defence needs the input of the third party.

14 Who may waive the protections for attorney-client communications?

The attorney decides whether or not legal privilege applies (see question 7). Because an attorney has a duty to maintain confidentiality and is criminally liable when he or she intentionally does not maintain confidentiality, in our opinion, the attorney should not waive legal privilege but should instead initiate proceedings so that matters can be discussed with a judge.

Although it is the attorney who should decide whether or not information falls within the scope of legal privilege, if a client acts on his or her own and shares privileged information with a third party, in practice it will be difficult to uphold the privileged nature of those documents. On the other hand, it can be argued that even if a professional entrusted with privileged information shares documents with a third party, this does not automatically mean that he or she altogether waives confidentiality with regard to this information (Opinion Advocate-General, ECLI:NL:PHR:2013:BV3004, not disputed by the Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 12 February 2013, ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BV3004). In that specific matter, information was given to authorities with a derived privilege, but that was not the case in the judgment of the Amsterdam District Court

of 4 September 1991 (NJ 1992, 351), where an attorney had disclosed privileged information to a third party out of court, and could nevertheless still invoke legal privilege with respect to this information in court.

15 What actions constitute waiver of the protections for attorney-client communications?

If an attorney should decide to waive legal privilege, this is established by disclosure of the privileged information. As mentioned in question 5, the Court in The Hague, in its decision that legal privilege was not applicable to a specific (factual) report, considered that the report at hand had been given to the defendants in draft form at an earlier stage, and a reservation had been made that the report could be shared with the relevant authorities.

The Court did not expressly consider that it was of the opinion that this could be seen as an implied waiver, but this opinion could be derived from the judgment.

16 Under what circumstances is an inadvertent disclosure of an attorney-client communication excused?

An inadvertent disclosure of attorney-client communication constitutes a violation of the obligation to maintain confidentiality and is therefore not excused. Only in the case that this communication is clearly the object of, or has contributed to the commission of, a criminal offence, does professional legal privilege not apply to this communication.

There appears to be no case law in the Netherlands regarding inadvertent disclosure, and no procedure exists that could prevent a third party to use inadvertently disclosed information.

17 Can attorney-client communications be shared among employees of an entity, without waiving the protections? How?

When attorney-client communications are shared among employees of an entity, this should not constitute waiving the protections of legal privilege. First of all, as mentioned in question 7, the attorney decides whether communications fall within the scope of his or her legal privilege. Furthermore, as far as we know, there is no case law about whether or not protections are waived when privileged information is shared among employees, and in dawn raids it is general practice to filter the employees' documents and mailboxes to leave privileged information out of the seizure.

As an additional safeguard, one could establish in writing that the attorney can communicate with multiple persons within the company-client as his or her contact persons on behalf of the client, so there is even less chance of discussion about whether or not further internal distribution of attorney-client communication among these persons could affect the privileged nature of the attorney-client communication.

18 Describe your jurisdiction's main exceptions to the protections for attorney-client communications.

See questions 6 and 16. The main exceptions to the protections for attorney-client communications are the following:

- Documents that are clearly the object of, or have contributed to the commission of a criminal offence (*corpora et instrumenta delicti*) do not fall under the scope of legal privilege. Those documents can therefore be seized (article 98 paragraph 5 of the Code of Criminal Procedure). Because in most cases there will be discussion about this between the authorities and the attorney, documents can be sealed and the attorney can file a complaint with the district court.
- Based on case law of the Supreme Court, attorney-client communications can be seized if the search for truth prevails over the concept of professional legal privilege. This is only allowed in exceptional circumstances.
- Based on article 1 of the Prevention of Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism Act, attorneys are obliged to notify authorities when unusual financial transactions are encountered in the situations mentioned in question 6.
- The District Court in The Hague judged that governance reports that contain only factual findings and factual material and no legal findings, qualifications or conclusions do not fall within the scope of legal privilege. However, as already explained, a relevant consideration of the Court with regard to this decision was that the report had been given in draft form to the defendants at an earlier stage, and a reservation had been made that the report could be shared with the relevant authorities.

19 Can the protections for attorney–client communications be overcome by any criminal or civil proceedings where waiver has not otherwise occurred?

When an attorney invokes his or her legal privilege when he or she is called to testify before court, the court will assess whether the refusal to testify is reasonable. The court will decline the claim for privilege regarding all that is considered not to be entrusted to the attorney in his or her professional capacity.

And, as explained in questions 6 and 18, *corpora et instrumenta delicti* can be seized, as well as documents that can help to reveal the truth, but only if exceptional circumstances ask for the prevailing of the search for truth over the legal privilege.

20 In what circumstances are foreign protections for attorney–client communications recognised in your jurisdiction?

In civil proceedings, a Dutch court can hear witnesses at the request of a foreign authority, if the request is based on the Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters (18 March 1970). Based on article 11 of this Convention, the witness may refuse to give evidence in so far as he or she has a privilege or duty to refuse to give the evidence under the law of the foreign authority, and the privilege or duty has been specified in the request or has been otherwise confirmed to the Netherlands by the foreign authority.

A foreign authority can also request a Dutch court to hear witnesses based on the Council Regulation on cooperation between the courts of member states in the taking of evidence in civil or commercial matters (No. 1206/2001 - 28 May 2001). In accordance with article 4(1)(e) of this Regulation, a request of a foreign authority must contain:

...where appropriate, a reference to a right to refuse to testify under the law of the member state of the requesting court.

21 Describe the best practices in your jurisdiction that aim to ensure that protections for attorney–client communications are maintained.

The best practices are as follows:

- It is advisable for the attorney and client to always indicate clearly that the correspondence between them is confidential by labelling it as such (for example, ‘client/attorney privileged’).
- Do not misuse the legal privilege for communications that clearly do not fall under the scope of the privilege.
- An attorney should not voluntarily cooperate with the authorities or give permission to seize confidential documents. The attorney should always invoke his or her legal privilege. Also, see the Manual for Attorneys to Ensure Confidentiality and Professional Legal Privilege with regard to External Investigations, published by the Netherlands Bar in March 2013. This Manual offers practical guidance for attorneys on how to act in criminal investigations and investigations by other government authorities.
- The decision about whether certain documents are confidential should first and foremost be taken by the attorney. If a discussion arises, only competent judges, and not investigating government officials, can give final decisions about the seizure of confidential documents.
- When government officials want to seize attorney–client communications, these communications should be sealed by the investigating judge, in order to enable the attorney in question to share his or her point of view about the privileged nature of the documents. The attorney’s standpoint should be respected by government authorities and the investigating judge, except if there is no reasonable doubt about the attorney’s standpoint being incorrect. The attorney can file a written complaint with the district court against the decision of the investigating judge and eventually appeal the decision of the district court at the Dutch Supreme Court.

Work product

22 Describe the elements necessary to confer protection over work product.

In the Netherlands, we are not familiar with the notion of ‘work product’ as a separate component of legal privilege. However, as explained above, legal privilege extends to all documents that are written to or by an attorney or documents that are given or sent to an attorney in his or her professional capacity (giving advice, support and representation). In a Supreme

Court case of 24 January 2006 (ECLI:NL:PHR:2006:AU4666), the mother of an accused had provided her diary to the attorney of the accused. The Supreme Court considered the diary as information that was shared with the attorney in his professional capacity, and thus the diary fell within the scope of legal privilege. Documents created in anticipation of litigation fall under the scope of legal privilege on the grounds that an attorney and a client have a fundamental right to prepare for proceedings in confidence.

Because there is no separate notion of ‘work product’ in the Netherlands, the same rules and principles that apply to attorney–client communications also apply to documents created in anticipation of litigation. The answers to the questions below concerning work product will therefore mainly refer to the answers above concerning legal privilege and attorney–client communications.

23 Describe any limitations on the contexts in which the protections for work product are recognised.

Since we do not recognise the ‘work product’ distinction in the Netherlands, reference is made to the limitations that apply to attorney–client communications. These limitations are explained in question 6.

24 Who may invoke the protections for work product?

It is the attorney who decides whether legal privilege applies; it is a duty incumbent on the attorney. The legal privilege follows the document that is protected by it, and thus also the work product. It does not matter where the work product is found. This means that the client can also invoke the protection for a (draft) work product at his or her premises or on his or her computer. The same goes for third parties that are instructed by the defence to render advice and who are in possession of documents or work products received from the defence (attorney).

25 Is greater protection given to certain types of work product?

See question 4, where a Supreme Court case is discussed in which the Court decided that a governance report only containing facts did not fall within the scope of legal privilege.

26 Is work product created by, or at the direction of, in-house counsel protected?

In-house counsel admitted to the Netherlands Bar can invoke the same professional legal privilege as outside attorneys. This legal privilege also applies to documents created in anticipation of litigation. See question 2.

27 In what circumstances do materials created by others, at the direction of an attorney or at the direction of a client, fall within the scope of the protections for work product?

Third parties that are assigned by the attorney to give the defence (expert) advice on the legal issue for which the client has approached the attorney can claim privilege. See question 9.

28 Can a third party overcome the protections for work product? How?

No. It is the attorney, not a third party, who decides whether the right to legal privilege applies. Other than a judge who decides that very special circumstances overcome protections of legal privilege, no third party can overcome these protections.

See the answers to questions 7, 9, 14 and 17.

29 Who may waive the protections for work product?

The attorney decides whether or not legal privilege applies. Because an attorney has an obligation to maintain confidentiality and is even criminally liable when he or she does not, the attorney should not waive legal privilege. See questions 7, 9, 14 and 17.

30 What actions constitute waiver of the protections for work product?

See question 15.

31 May clients demand their attorney’s files relating to their representation? Does that waive the protections for work product?

A client has the right to be informed of all the relevant information in his or her case and therefore also to their attorney’s files relating to

their representation (Rule 8 of the Rules of Professional Conduct 1992). However, this does not waive protections. See question 7.

32 Can work product be disclosed to government authorities, without waiving the relevant protections? How?

No clear answer can be given to this question. On the one hand, sharing privileged documents with the authorities will make it difficult to uphold the privileged nature of the documents. On the other hand, the Supreme Court considers that even if a professional entrusted with privileged information shares documents with a third party, this does not automatically mean that he or she altogether waives confidentiality.

See questions 7, 9, 14 and 17

33 Under what circumstances is an inadvertent disclosure of work product excused?

Not applicable.

34 Describe your jurisdiction's main exceptions to the protections for work product.

These are the same exceptions that apply to attorney-client communications. See questions 15 and 18.

35 Can the protections for work product be overcome by any criminal or civil proceedings where waiver has not otherwise occurred?

See question 15.

36 In what circumstances are foreign protections for work product recognised in your jurisdiction?

See question 20.

Common issues

37 Who determines whether attorney-client communications or work product are protected from disclosure?

It is the attorney who should be asked whether he or she is of the opinion that the communications or work product fall within the scope of the legal privilege. See question 7. The examining judge will then decide whether or not the attorney is correct in his or her point of view, and the attorney can file a written complaint against this decision.

Update and trends

The most relevant current development is the decision of the District Court in The Hague to exclude a governance report from legal privilege, because it was stated that the report contained only facts. See question 4. It is expected that Courts of Appeals or the Supreme Court will develop more case law on this matter.

Furthermore, there is an emerging trend of prosecution authorities and political authorities publicly discussing the broad scope of professional legal privilege in the Netherlands, as well as alleged misuse of this privilege by professionals. It is very possible that this debate will lead to new, more strict, legislation concerning professional legal privilege.

38 Can attorney-client communications or work product be shared among clients with a common interest who are represented by separate attorneys, without waiving the protections? How may the protections be preserved or waived?

See the answers to questions 7, 9, 14 and 17.

Although it is the attorney who should decide whether or not information falls within the scope of legal privilege, when a client acts on his or her own and shares privileged information with a third party, in practice it will be difficult to uphold the privileged nature of those documents. In this particular situation, whether it could effectively be argued that the clients did not mean to waive the confidentiality depends on the circumstances. We are unaware of any case law on this specific situation.

39 Can attorney-client communications or work product be disclosed to government authorities without waiving the protections? How?

See questions 7, 9, 14, 17 and 32.

Other privileges or protections

40 Are there other recognised privileges or protections in your jurisdiction that permit attorneys and clients to maintain the confidentiality of communications or work product?

In the Netherlands we only know the legal privilege protections as discussed above.

SJÖCRONA · VAN STIGT

A D V O C A T E N

Enide Perez
Stéphanie Heinerman

ep@svsadvocates.com
sh@svsadvocates.com

‘t Hoenstraat 5
2596 HX Den Haag
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 70 346 7472
Fax: +31 70 392 4378

Oostmaaslaan 71
3063 AN Rotterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 10 436 4311
Fax: +31 10 436 6700

www.svsadvocates.com