



Leasing Taxation Estonia

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1 Legal Issues

1.1 Legal basis

In the Estonian legislation, leasing agreements are regulated by the Law of Obligations Act according to which, by the leasing contract, the lessor undertakes to acquire a certain object (the object of leasing) from a seller and to grant use of the object to the lessee. The lessee is required to pay a fee for use of the object of leasing. Since the leasing agreement is a special type of credit agreement, the provisions of the loan and credit agreement are additionally applied to the leasing agreement (Law of Obligations Act § 397-400)

In addition, if the lessee is a consumer, the regulation of the consumer credit contract set forth in the Law of Obligations Act and Creditors and Credit Intermediaries Act applies to the lease agreements.

Since the regulation set forth in the Law of Obligations Act may be regarded as non-imperative, some contractual arrangements can be negotiated between the parties (unlike provided in law) to fit their individual needs. In terms of consumer credit contracts, the agreements to the detriment of the consumer are void.

1.2 Classification of Lease Agreements

The Estonian legal framework does not define or distinguish between subtypes of lease agreements. The distinction between operating leases and finance leases only exists for taxation and accounting purposes.

1.3 The legal form and operating license of lessors

According to Estonian legislation, it is not mandatory for lessors to have a specific license to offer leasing services. However, to offer a lease, at least one of the following operating licenses is a must: operating license of a credit institution, lender, or financial institution. When choosing an activity license, it is important to distinguish whether the service is offered only to legal entities or also to consumers. Leasing, considered as consumer credit, may only be offered by companies that have the corresponding operating license - credit institutions (including cooperative banks), lenders and intermediaries, and under limited conditions without a separate creditor's operating license, also savings and loan associations. In the latter case, if the exception provided for in the Creditors and Intermediaries Act applies to the savings and loan association. In such a case, both the savings and loan association and other companies (only when offering leasing to legal entities) must apply for a financial institution operating license from the Estonian Financial Intelligence Unit in accordance with the Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Act.

There are no general requirements regarding the legal form of lessors under Estonian legislation. However, if a financing institution offers leasing to consumers, the choice of legal form may be restricted depending on the type of operating license under which the service is provided. If the lessor is a credit institution, then according to the Credit Institutions Act, the legal form may only be a public limited company or commercial association (in the case of an association bank). If the lessor is a savings and loan association, the legal form is a profit cooperative according to the Savings and Loan Associations Act. If the lessor is a credit provider licensed under the Creditors and Credit Intermediaries Act, legal forms such as joint-stock company, limited partnership and profit-making cooperative are allowed. In the case of a lessor operating as a financial institution, the law does not set any restrictions regarding the legal form, except that it must be a company.

1.4 Supervision, leasing advertising

The supervision over the lessors which act as credit institutions or creditors is conducted by the Financial Supervision Authority. The Financial Supervision Authority also provides consolidated supervision over lessors that belong into consolidated group of the credit institution. The lessors not being credit institutions and not being under supervision of the Financial Supervision Authority have to obtain the authorisation from the Estonian Financial Intelligence Unit.

The provisions of the Advertising Act stipulate that advertisements for financial services must include the name, trademark, or domain name of the service provider and contain a call to review the terms and conditions of the financial service, and if necessary consult an expert. In an financial service advertisement that involves the willingness to grant consumer credit or mediate consumer credit agreements, i.e. conclude leasing agreements with consumers (consumer credit agreement advertisement) must be informed in a clear, concise and prominent way with an example of the interest rate (specifying whether it is fixed or unfixed) the amount of credit drawn down, the annual percentage rate of charge (indicating what charges make it up), where applicable the duration of the consumer contract, price of the object of the contract in the event//upon immediate payment and the amount of the advance payment, the total amount payable by the consumer and the number and amount of repayments. It should also clearly inform about any compulsory additional agreement, such as insurance. Therefore, a leasing advertisement may only include the previously mentioned information and the creditors' name, authorisation number and contact details of the place of business. The Advertising Act also sets several restrictions on the text of the advertisement and its disclosure.

When advertising leasing, it must be taken into account that an advertisement which communicates the willingness to make a sum of money available to the consumer under a credit agreement or via a broker, such agreements is prohibited in TV and radio programs (except for housing loans and overdraft facilities), and the advertisement must not, among other things, give the impression that taking out a consumer credit is a risk-free and easy way to solve financial problems, or incline consumers to unwise borrowing.

2 Accounting

2.1 Classification of Leases for Accounting Purposes

According to the Estonian financial reporting standard (the Estonian GAAP), leases are classified as either operating leases or finance leases. The basis for classification is established in the Accounting Standards Board guideline (ASBG) 9. A lease qualifies as a finance lease if it transfers to the lessee all or substantially all of the significant risks and rewards associated with ownership of the asset. Title may or may not eventually be transferred to the lessee.

An operating lease is a lease that does not meet the criteria of a finance lease. Classification is based on the nature of the transaction rather than its legal form.

According to the Accounting Standards Board guideline (ASBG) 9, it is also permitted to apply the Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) 16, under which the lessee no longer distinguishes between operating leases and finance leases. Instead, all contracts that meet the definition of a lease are recorded in its accounting using the finance lease method (with certain exceptions). The application of IFRS 16 is mandatory for companies that prepare their financial statements in accordance with International Accounting Standards.

2.2 Lessor Accounting

The accounting treatment of finance and operating leases corresponds to the guidance given in ASBG 9.

2.3 Lessee Accounting

The accounting treatment for finance and operating leases corresponds to the guidance given in ASBG 9. If it is decided to apply the IFRS 16 model, all lease agreements are recorded in the lessee's accounts on the balance sheet as an asset and a liability, measured at the fair value of the leased asset or at the present value of the minimum lease payments (whichever is lower), except in cases where the asset is short-term or of low value.

2.4 Sale and Leaseback

If a sale and leaseback transaction results in a finance lease, then in accordance with ASBG 9 the transaction is recognised as a financing transaction, not as a purchase and sale transaction, i.e. the "sold" asset remains in the balance sheet of the seller and a finance lease liability is recognised in the amount of the payment received ("sale price"). The difference between the "sale price" and the minimum lease payments is recognised as interest

expense over the lease term similarly to regular finance lease contracts. Under SME IFRS, any excess of the sales proceeds over the carrying amount of the “sold” asset is deferred and amortised to income over the lease term.

If a sale-leaseback transaction results in an operating lease, the transaction is recognised as a purchase and sale transaction, and any profit or loss is recognised immediately, except when:

- the sale price is below the fair value of the asset and the low price is compensated for by low interest rates in the future; or
- the sale price is above the fair value of the asset.

2.5 Back and Front-loaded Leases

For operating leases, the lease payments made over the lease term shall be recognized as an expense or revenue on a straight-line basis over the lease term unless another systematic basis is more representative of the time pattern of the benefit derived from the leased asset. Lease payments are recognised as an expense or revenue on a straight-line basis irrespective of the periods and amounts in which the payments are actually made.

2.6 Defeasance

There are no rules on defeasance of a lease in the financial accounting standards. Defeasance of a lease depends on the agreement terms.

3 Direct Taxation

3.1 Rate of Taxation

From 01.01.2025 the income tax rate in Estonia is 22 percent for resident companies and individuals as well as non-residents. Corporate income tax is calculated on the net amount of dividend by applying a rate of 22/78, which equals to 22 percent on the gross amount of distribution. The advance payment rate for income tax of credit institutions is 18 percent.

3.2 Taxation of Lessor

Individuals

Finance lease

The lessor is obliged to pay income tax on income derived from the lease and on interest. The lease payments are considered as income from transfer of property and any capital gain is taxed unless the income was derived from the transfer of movable property in personal use or transfer of a dwelling used as the individual's usual place of residence up to that moment.

Operating lease

The lessor is obliged to pay income tax on all income derived from the lease.

Corporations

The corporate tax system in Estonia differs from those used by many countries, so that corporate income is taxable mainly upon profit distribution in the form of a dividend. Therefore, lease income is not taxable for companies before the income is distributed to the shareholders, or another taxable payment is made.

3.3 Taxation of Lessee

If a leased asset is used for business purposes no income tax is payable. Non-business expenses are similarly

to a distribution of profit subject to tax. An expense is considered to be business related if it is incurred for the purpose of taxable income or is necessary or appropriate in order to preserve or develop such business, and if the expense is clearly made for business purposes. If the expense is not related to the business of the company, income tax at a rate of 22/78 on the net amount of the payment is applied.

Use of a leased asset in such a manner that an employee or a person equal to an employee (e.g. a spouse, a child, etc.) receives a monetarily appraisable benefit constitutes a fringe benefit and the costs incurred are subject to income tax and social tax. Taxes on fringe benefit related to the enabling of a use of a vehicle of the employer for activities not related to business are calculated according to engine power of the vehicle (kilowatt price).

3.4 Tax Depreciation

As in general Estonian companies pay income tax upon distribution of profit, tax depreciation is not relevant in the case of the Estonian corporate income tax system.

3.5 Investment Allowances

Allowances are not applicable under the Estonian system for companies.

3.6 Tax Consequences of Different Methods of Financing

Normal methods of financing do not result in tax consequences if the transferor does not incur unjustified losses.

3.7 Transfer of Ownership of Property

Individuals pay income tax on gains derived from sale of immovable or movable property. Any certified expenses directly related to the sales can be deducted from the income. No income tax consequences arise for the individual where income was derived from the transfer of movable property in personal use or transfer of a dwelling used as the individual's usual place of residence.

Capital gains received by the resident legal person are subject to taxation upon profit distribution.

3.8 Sale and Leaseback

There are no special regulations in the Estonian Income Tax Act regarding sale and leaseback transactions. The lease back is normally seen as a separate transaction from the sale and taxation follows general principles.

3.9 Back and Front-loaded Leases

There are no special tax regulations for back- or front-loaded leases. The tax treatment normally follows the accounting treatment.

3.10 Leasing and Leverage Tax Aspects

There are no special tax consequences arising from such arrangements, but under certain conditions the transaction may be subject to taxation under transfer pricing regulation (transactions between related parties) based on the market price of the transactions.

3.11 Termination Arrangements

There are no special rules dealing with early termination.

3.12 International Issues

Taxation of Non-Resident Lessor / Resident Lessee

In the case of a finance lease, a non-resident lessor is obliged to pay income tax on income derived from the lease, i.e., on capital gains from the transfer of property, if the leased asset is either registered or to be registered in an Estonian register or immovable property is located in Estonia. Income derived from the lease is not subject to taxation in Estonia if payment is made to a person resident in a country with whom Estonia has concluded an agreement for the avoidance of double taxation (tax treaty) and lessee has received a certificate of residence to prove this. Income derived from the immovable property located in Estonia is always taxable in Estonia.

In the case of an operating lease, a non-resident lessor's income derived from lease and royalties which were received from property registered in Estonia or the subject to entry in a register in Estonia, is subject to taxation. The resident lessee is obliged to withhold income tax at a rate of up to 10 percent from payments made to a non-resident, as operating lease can be considered as royalty payment. Estonia has tax treaties that allow Estonia, as a revenue source country, to tax license fees and the tax rate may turn out to be more favourable compared to the domestic law. Estonia has as well tax treaties in which only the country of residence has the right to tax, i.e. there is no obligation to pay income tax in Estonia. The tax treaty sets a lower withholding income tax rate of 5 percent to merchandise, commercial or scientific equipment and in the other cases the tax at a rate of 10 percent applies. There are also tax treaties, according to which fees paid for the use or right to use industrial, commercial, or scientific equipment do not fall under the concept of license fee at all.

If the lessor is an EU or Swiss Confederation resident company, then also such payments are not taxable, if the value of the lease payment corresponds to the market value and at least one of the following conditions is met:

- The lessee has owned at least 25 percent of the lessor's shares at the time of the transaction and for a minimum of two years prior to the transaction
- The lessor has owned at least 25 percent of the lessee's shares at the time of the transaction and for a minimum of two years prior to the transaction
- One and the same resident company of the EU or the Swiss Confederation owns at the time of payment and has owned during the period of two years or more immediately preceding the payment at least 25 percent of the share capital of the lessee and the lessor.

If a non-resident receives rental payments under an operating lease contract for real estate located in Estonia, these are subject to Estonian income tax at a rate of 22 percent. The payment of income tax can be performed by withholding the tax when the Estonian resident lessee makes the payment.

A natural person who is a resident of a contracting state of the European Economic Area and has received taxable income in Estonia may make deductions from the income on the same basis as a resident of Estonia. Non-residents of other countries cannot make deductions from taxable income in Estonia.

Taxation of Resident Lessor / Non-Resident Lessee

A resident lessor pays income tax similarly in Estonia regardless of whether the lessee is a resident or a non-resident.

3.13 Withholding Taxes

Income tax paid or withheld in another country is deductible from the income tax payable in Estonia unless the income is not taxable according to the Estonian Income Tax Act. The overpaid amount of income tax paid in the foreign country is not refunded in Estonia.

However, as a rule tax treaties allow the income tax that was withheld in Estonia to be deducted from the corporate income tax of the residence country.

3.14 Anti-avoidance

In Estonia, the general anti-avoidance measure is that if it is evident from the content of a transaction that the transaction is carried out for tax evasion purposes, conditions which correspond to the actual economic content of the transaction apply upon taxation. In addition, the general anti-abuse provision in the Income Tax Act applies in situations where the purpose of a transaction or chain of transactions is not complete tax evasion, but to achieve an artificially more favourable tax consequence.

The Income Tax Act provides several other measures against tax evasion. For example, under certain conditions the following may be subject to income tax: the residual cost of borrowing of a resident company (except a financial company), the profit of controlled foreign companies and the difference between the market value and the book value of assets transferred out of Estonia to a permanent place of business in another country (the so-called exit tax).

There are no thin capitalization regulations in Estonia.

The regulation concerning transfer pricing taxation is provided in the Income Tax Act. It provides that if the value of a transaction conducted between related resident and non-resident or resident persons differs from the value of similar transactions conducted between independent persons, the tax authorities may, upon making an assessment of income tax, apply the value of transactions used by independent persons under similar conditions. Income tax at a rate of 22/78 must be paid either on the income which the taxpayer would have derived or the expense which the taxpayer would not have incurred, if the value of the transaction conducted with the related person had been such as applied by independent persons under similar conditions. The principles of transfer pricing must also be followed by permanent establishments (e.g. branches) of non-resident legal entities located in Estonia. In Estonia, the transfer pricing documentation requirement is applied.

Payments made to companies located in a non-cooperative jurisdiction for tax purposes¹ by an Estonian company are subject to taxation at a rate of 22/78.

3.15 Tax Authorities' Approach

There is no special guidance from the tax authorities regarding leasing taxation. It is possible to apply for a binding decision from the Tax Authority who would provide its binding opinion regarding taxation of the transaction that will be performed in the future.

4. Value Added Tax

4.1 General

The Estonian VAT Act broadly follows the European VAT directive 2006/112/EC. In the core aspects, the current system of VAT is identical to the common VAT system used in the EU.

VAT is due on any supply of goods or services made in Estonia, where it is a taxable supply made by a taxable person in the course or furtherance of a business carried on by said person, including the leasing or hire of goods, the transfer of rights, and obligations to refrain from an economic activity.

A company can deduct VAT, if the following conditions are met:

- a VAT liability has arisen
- the supply is used for the company's business purposes
- the company has an invoice from the supplier.

Goods imported into Estonia from outside the EU are liable to import VAT. Import VAT can be deducted on the basis of a customs declaration in the tax period during which the customs released the goods. Only a company that has a separate permit from the Tax and Customs Board need not pay VAT at the time of importation and can use the possibility of entering the import VAT amount (as subject to reverse charge VAT accounting) in the VAT return.

¹ The European Union's list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes can be found [here](#) (updated twice a year).

There are certain situations in which input VAT is not deductible. For example, where the VAT incurred relates to onward exempt supplies (with no input VAT deduction right) or non-business (including private) activities. Where VAT relates to both taxable and non-taxable supplies (exempt supplies or non-business activities), an apportionment is required and only the portion relating to taxable activities is deductible. In addition, input VAT deduction in relation to company cars is limited, if the assets are not used for business purposes solely.

4.2 VAT Rate

Estonia applies a standard VAT rate of 24 percent as of 01.07.2025.

The VAT Act contains a list of goods and services, the supply of which is subject to a percent VAT rate (for example, exported goods and goods delivered to a free zone, as well as international transport services). Certain transactions, such as postal services, healthcare services, insurance services, the leasing of real estate or parts thereof, and financial services, are exempt from VAT.

The provision of financial services (including leasing) is tax-exempt supply under the Estonian VAT Act. However, there is a possibility to add VAT to the supply of financial services if a taxable person has beforehand notified the tax authority in writing. If a taxable person has chosen to add VAT to the price of the services, the decision is binding for at least two years. Optional taxation is available domestically. It is not allowed to use optional taxation when financial services are provided to a taxable person of another member state.

Although, the provision of the financial services is a tax-exempt supply, no restrictions to the deduction of VAT will apply, if such exempt supplies can be regarded incidental tax-exempt supplies.

4.3 Registration Matters

Compulsory Registration

Estonian Entities

If an Estonian entity (including the fixed establishment of a foreign person) makes taxable supplies in Estonia over the current VAT registration threshold of EUR 40,000, the entity is required to register and account for Estonian VAT. The VAT registration threshold of 40,000 euros includes the taxable turnover of goods and services subject to taxation in Estonia, turnover of real estate transactions (except for occasional transactions), and turnover of insurance and financial services (except for occasional services). The turnover of the transfer of fixed assets and the provision of services taxable at the place of a business customer are not included in the threshold of 40 000 euros.

Non-Estonian Entities

When a trader, with no fixed establishment in Estonia and who is liable to taxation in another country, makes a taxable supply in Estonia (that is not accounted for by the Estonian customer under the reverse charge procedure), then that foreign trader must register for VAT from the date the taxable supply was made. No registration threshold applies for such traders. The registration obligation does not arise if the foreign trader effects only supply taxable at the zero percent VAT rate unless it is intra-Community supply of goods. Different rules apply in the case of distance sales and e-commerce, as well as for businesses registered under the special taxation scheme for small businesses.

Voluntary Registration

If a local or foreign entity trades below the registration threshold, it can still choose to register voluntarily for VAT. Upon the registration, it is obliged to prove its business activities or plan to commence business in Estonia.

4.4 Treatment of Asset Finance Transactions by Type

The VAT treatment is dependent upon the exact conditions of the lease agreement. The classification for taxation purposes and accounting purposes may differ.

Finance Lease

The provision of goods under a finance lease is treated as a supply of goods for VAT purposes. The VAT is payable at the time the goods are first made available. In the Estonian VAT Act the supply of goods is defined as the transfer of possession of goods together with the risk of accidental loss of the goods and the right to dispose of the goods and enjoy the economic benefits related to the goods as owner, regardless of the status of the goods in property law. In addition, the transaction is treated as a sale of goods where it is stated in the lease agreement that ownership passes to the contractual user of the goods upon termination of the contract (i.e., on payment of the final instalment).

VAT becomes payable in the taxation period when the goods were made available to the purchaser. If there have been any prepayments before that, VAT is payable in the period when the prepayment was received (considering that the amount paid includes also the VAT amount).

Operating lease

Operating lease is treated as a supply of services in VAT accounting. The VAT becomes payable at the time of each successive payment. The transaction that includes a right to purchase the leased asset at a residual value upon termination of the contract is also treated as operating lease.

VAT is payable on the first date on which either payment for the goods or services was received or the services were provided. In the case of regular provision of services, the time at which the services are provided and received is deemed to be the calendar month overlapping with the end of the period for which the invoice is submitted or during which payment (for consumed services) is to be made as agreed. The transaction must be reported in VAT calculation not later than after twelve calendar months.

Transfer of Lease Portfolios and Lease Agreements

A transfer of lease portfolios or agreements is not separately regulated under the Estonian VAT Act. If the rights and obligations provided in the lease contract would be transferred with other assets of the company (transfer of enterprise) then the transaction would not be subject to VAT.

If during the term of the leasing contract a lessor transfers the leasing object together with the obligations arising from the current leasing contract to a new lessor, i.e., only the lessor is changed, then no supply is created, and no VAT adjustment obligation would arise.

If during the term of the leasing contract a lessee will change then in terms of Law of Obligations Act it would be an assumption of contract but according to the VAT Act the transaction must be taxed as a transfer of goods. In the event of a change of lessee, the lease agreement is terminated prematurely, and the leased object is returned to the lessor. The previous lessee adjusts the amount of previously deducted input tax to correspond with the amount of lease payments actually paid, and the new lessee would be entitled to VAT deduction if the object of the lease will be used for business purposes.

4.5 Domestic Asset Finance Transactions

VAT Treatment for Lessor

The finance lease transaction is treated as a sale of goods which is a subject to Estonian VAT if the assets are located in Estonia. If the lessor has interest income from the leasing of the goods and the interest income is not included in the taxable value of the goods, but it is shown separately on the invoice the interest charge is treated as an exempt supply. VAT can be optionally added to the lease interest if the tax authorities have notified about the use of the option beforehand.

The operating lease transaction is treated as a supply of services. It is generally accepted when differentiation between the financial (interest) and non-financial element (lease payment) of the transaction is made. The leasing payments for the goods are subject to Estonian VAT. The interest paid for the leasing transaction may be treated as an exempt financial transaction (if lessor does not opt for taxation, see above). In practice sometimes financial element is not distinguished from the lease payment on the invoice and then the supply consists of only taxable services.

VAT paid or payable on goods or services received to be used for repair and maintenance of an object of leasing is deductible as an input value added tax of the lessor only if:

- the lessor has the obligation to provide repair and maintenance of the object of the lease agreement and the lease agreement is taxed with regard to the goods as well as financial operation or
- the lessor provides repair and maintenance service.

If the lessor has certain costs (i.e., administrative costs) that relate to both taxable activities and exempt financial services in Estonia, then the lessor must calculate the proportion (the so-called 'pro-rata calculation') that relates to taxable supplies in order to determine the deductible amount. However, if the proportion of exempt supplies is less than one percent of all supplies made or exempt supplies are incidental, then no restrictions to the deduction of VAT will apply.

VAT Treatment for Lessee

Lessees should show the input tax incurred in the period on the relevant VAT return, assuming they are taxable persons.

Input VAT becomes deductible at the time the deductible tax becomes chargeable. In case of the finance lease where the VAT is due on the total value of the goods at the time the goods are provided, the VAT is immediately deductible by the lessee.

Input VAT shall be deducted on the basis of an invoice. This means that lessee must have the invoice by the day of the submission of the VAT return in order to deduct the input VAT.

In case a car is leased under finance or operating lease contract, input VAT deduction is limited to 50 per cent, unless it is proven that the car is used for business purposes solely. Special rules apply regarding the vehicles that are only temporarily in business or non-business use.

4.6 Cross-border issues

Lessors leasing out of country (Estonia)

If a finance lease contract is concluded between an Estonian lessor and a person with a VAT registration number in another member state, the supply is taxed with zero-rated VAT when the goods are delivered from Estonia to another member state. If the lessee has no VAT registration number in the other country, then in certain cases the VAT registration obligation might arise for the lessor. Finance lease is subject to VAT in Estonia if the delivery of the goods to another member state is not proven.

The exception is a transfer of new means of transport in terms of a finance lease and its delivery to other member state. This transaction would be taxed in Estonia at a zero VAT rate as the tax obligation would arise in the other country, despite of the VAT status of the customer.

In the case of an operating lease the EU Directive 2006/112/EC Art 44 is applied. It means that the service is taxable by the VAT registered customer in another member state, who accounts for the VAT on the service received under the reverse charge procedure. The prerequisite for applying this principle is that the lessee is VAT registered in another Member State.

Exceptions apply regarding the leasing of means of transport. Hiring, leasing or establishment of a usufruct of means of transport for a period longer than 30 calendar days is taxable at the place the customer is established or has his permanent address or usually resides where services are provided to a customer with no VAT registration, or third country person not engaged in business. If the customer has a seat or place of residence in Estonia, the service is taxable in Estonia. If the customer has a seat or place of residence outside Estonia, the service is not taxable in Estonia.

Hiring, leasing or establishment of a usufruct of pleasure or recreational boats for a period longer than 90 calendar days is taxable in Estonia if the service provider's seat or permanent business establishment is in Estonia and the customer is not VAT registered, or a third country person not engaged in business.

If the finance or operating lease agreement is concluded between an Estonian lessor and a non- EU lessee and involves movement of goods out of EU, the transaction is zero rated in Estonia regardless of the VAT status of the recipient (except for hiring, leasing or establishment of a usufruct of boats and means of transport explained earlier).

Movement of goods

If assets are transported from Estonia to another Member State under a finance lease contract, it is considered to be an intra-Community supply. If the goods are transported to another Member State temporarily (under an operating lease), it is regarded as a supply of services and not a intra-Community supply of goods. These goods must be listed separately in the lessor's books. Assets transported from Estonia to non-EU countries under a finance lease are treated as an export for VAT purposes. The movement of goods under an operating lease is considered to be a temporary exportation, with a commitment to re-import the goods later.

Lessor's leasing into the country (Estonia)

VAT Treatment for Lessor

Generally, a foreign lessor is not obliged to register for VAT purposes in Estonia if the transaction is taxable by an Estonian VAT registered lessee in Estonia.

If the operating lease contract is concluded between a foreign lessor and an Estonian lessee who is not registered for VAT in Estonia, the transaction is generally taxable according to the rules in the state of lessor. An obligation to register for VAT purposes may arise for the lessee when the transaction has not been subject to taxation elsewhere.

Movement of goods

When goods are transported from another EU member state to Estonia for the purposes of effecting finance lease operations, the transfer is regarded as intra-Community acquisition of goods by the Estonian VAT registered lessee. When the goods are moved to Estonia for finance lease purposes to a lessee not registered for VAT purposes in Estonia, the VAT registration obligation might arise for the lessor.

VAT Treatment for Lessee

An acquisition of goods under a finance lease contract from another member state is considered to be an intra-Community acquisition and the reverse charge mechanism is applied by the recipient of the goods in Estonia, except for financial component (interest, transaction fees) as these are normally treated as VAT exempt.

The importer of goods is responsible for paying import VAT and customs duty, if required, irrespective of whether he is VAT registered or not.

In the case of an operating lease a temporary importation procedure with a partial or total relief from import duties may be used. The amount of import duties payable in respect of goods placed under the temporary importation procedure with partial relief from import duties shall be set at three percent, for every month or fraction of a month during which the goods have been placed under the temporary importation procedure with partial relief, of the amount of duties which would have been payable on the said goods had they been released for free circulation on the date on which they were placed under the temporary importation procedure. The maximum period during which goods may remain under the temporary importation procedure shall be 24 months (exceptionally extensions possible).

In the case of importation into free circulation, the Estonian lessee, who is deemed to be the importer of the leased equipment, is responsible for paying the customs duty and import VAT.

VAT recovery issues

If the goods were acquired or services received by a VAT registered person and the property is used in a VAT taxable business, the person is entitled to deduct the input VAT in Estonia. A lessee from another EU country or from non-EU country who is not registered for VAT purposes in Estonia may apply for VAT refund:

- from other member state under the Council Directive 2008/9/EC.
- from a non-EU country under the Directive 86/560/EEC (also called 13th Council Directive).

4.7 Termination

Termination of Leasing Agreements

There are no special provisions regarding termination of finance lease agreements. Upon termination of an operating or finance lease agreement, where it is followed by the subsequent sale of the leased good, the latter is regarded as a separate supply of goods. VAT is charged on the usual value the goods. Where a new lease agreement is concluded, taxation depends on whether the new lease agreement is a finance or operating lease agreement.

Penalty Payments

Penalty payments are not taxable supplies.

Rebates of Rentals

Rebates are dealt with by the issue of credit notes, under which the lessor can claim a reduction in VAT payable when the credit note is issued. Based on the credit note the lessor is entitled to make amendments in the VAT return concerning the period during which the invoice was cancelled, and the lessee is entitled to the corresponding reduction in deductible input tax. A credit note must have reference to the initial invoice referred to on it.

Upon termination of a finance lease agreement, where the lessee who is not registered for VAT purposes returns the goods, the seller may adjust the amount of VAT payable for the period in which the goods were returned by the amount of VAT refunded to the purchaser.

Repossessions/Sale of Repossessed Assets

If a finance lease contract discontinues and the lessor transfers the lease asset it is regarded as a separate taxable supply. Since under an operating lease, the ownership of the goods remains with the lessor, repossession would have no effect for VAT purposes.

4.8 Other VAT Procedures

Bad Debt Relief

The VAT Act allows an adjustment of previously paid VAT when writing off bad debts.

A supplier has the right to reduce the tax liability by the amount of the VAT calculated on the goods transferred or services provided for which no full or partial payment was received. VAT adjustment is made in accordance with the unpaid part of invoice if all the following conditions are met:

- An proper invoice has been issued for the transferred goods or the provided service;
- the amount of the VAT was calculated on the transaction and correctly reflected in the VAT return;
- the claim has not been transferred;
- at least 12 months have passed since the due date for payment of the invoice, but not more than three years;
- the claim has been written off in accounting;
- in the case of a claim containing VAT amount exceeding 30,000 euros, the claim has been certified by a court judgment which has entered into force;
- the purchaser is not a related person within the meaning of the Income Tax Act;
- the purchaser has been notified in writing of the write-off of the claim in the accounting in the month of the write-off, indicating the amount of the VAT related to the written-off claim.

Adjustment of VAT amount is made in the same period when the receivable was written off in the accounting. If the claim on which the reduction is based is subsequently paid in part or in full, the claim is to be included

back in the VAT report in correspondence with the part paid for in the reporting period when the claim was paid.

A purchaser who failed to pay the invoice in part or in full but deducted the VAT shown on the invoice as input VAT, incurs VAT liability in the period when the notification of the write-off of the claim in the accounting of supplier was received.

5 Stamp Duty

There are no other turnover or business taxes in Estonia.

An obligation to pay stamp duties in Estonia may arise upon the termination of a finance lease and re-registration of ownership. Such obligation depends on the type of the lease asset (immovable property, a ship or other movable property to be registered in Estonia). The rate of the state fee is fixed in the State Fees Act or set as a certain percentage of the value of the transaction.

6 Other Issues

6.1 Customs Duty

The rules governing customs are stipulated in the Customs Act and the Community Customs Code. This code is applied to trade between Estonia and countries and territories remaining outside of the Customs territory of the European Community. The import and export duties are regulated by the Commission Implementing Regulation (EEC) No 2658/87 on the tariff and statistical nomenclature and Common Customs Tariff. Reliefs from customs duties are regulated by the Council Regulation (EC) No 1186/2009.

Basic EU rules regarding Customs duty rates are found in the Common Customs Tariff, called TARIC.

Customs duty is applied to goods, which are imported for release into free circulation in Estonia or under a temporary importation procedure. In calculating the Customs duty, the following are taken into account:

- customs tariffs
- origin of the good
- customs value of the goods.

According to the Community Customs Code the goods that have been placed to the customs free zone are considered, for the purpose of import duties and commercial policy import measures, as not being on Community customs territory. This applies if the goods are not released for free circulation or placed under another customs procedure.

6.2 Registration fee and motor vehicle tax

In Estonia, a registration fee and an annual motor vehicle tax apply to motor vehicles, with the amount depending on the characteristics of the vehicle.

When a vehicle is entered in the motor register in Estonia for the first time, a registration fee must be paid in accordance with the Road Traffic Act. The registration fee must also be paid before registering the first change of ownership of a vehicle, if the registration fee has not previously been paid for that vehicle. The registration fee is paid to the Transport Administration. According to the law, the registration fee is paid by the party in whose interest the transaction is made, which may be the buyer, seller, or leasing company.

As an exception, the transfer of ownership is not regarded as a first change of ownership if, at the end of a lease agreement, the individual listed as the responsible user in the motor register during the lease period becomes the owner instead of the leasing company. In such a case, the registration fee is paid when the person who became the owner of the vehicle at the end of the leasing contract subsequently transfers the ownership, and the vehicle is re-registered. The motor vehicle tax applies to the following categories of vehicles:

- Passenger cars – M1 and M1G
- Vans, panel vans, pickups – N1 and N1G
- Motorcycles – L3e, L4e, L5e, L6e, and L7e
- Off-road vehicles – MS2
- Wheeled tractors – T1b, T3, and T5

The amount of the motor vehicle tax is determined based on the environmental characteristics of the vehicle and takes into account its specific CO2 emissions, mass, and, to a certain extent, its age, which are added to the base amount. The base amount is 50 euros for all vehicles. The motor vehicle tax is paid to the Tax and Customs Board. The payer of the motor vehicle tax is the owner registered in the motor vehicle register, or, if there is a responsible user, the latter—that is, the lessee.

6.3 Trade Tax, Transfer Taxes and Other Capital Taxes

There are no trade taxes, transfer taxes or other capital taxes in Estonia.

OPERATING LEASE		FINANCE LEASE
Value Added Tax		
Subject to tax	Provision of services	Transfer of goods
Tax due date	End of the period for which an invoice is submitted or during which payment for the services has been agreed	Time of delivery of the product or receipt of payment, dependent on which takes place first
Taxation of leasing interest	Generally, interest is tax exempt supply to which VAT can be optionally added. Otherwise, taxable as part of the lease payment	Generally, tax exempt supply to which VAT can be optionally added. Otherwise, taxable as part of the lease payment
VAT rate	Generally, 24%. Rental of immovable property is tax exempt supply with an option to add VAT (except dwellings)	Generally, 24%. Transfer of immovable property is tax exempt supply, except for building land, new buildings, and significantly renovated buildings that are transferred for the first time within one year after the first put into use. Optionally VAT can be added to the supply of immovable (except dwellings)
Differences to transactions with non-residents	Rental of movable property is zero- rated supply. Special rules apply for means of transport.	Transaction is considered zero-rated export or intra-Community supply of goods, when goods are taken out of Estonia incl. transfer of new means of transport
Income Tax		
Payments to resident individual	Income tax is withheld from rent and royalties at the applicable rate (see p. 3.1), except when the payment is made to a sole proprietor	An individual pays income tax on gain from transfer of property (difference between the sales price and acquisition cost)

Payments to non-resident individual	Income tax at the applicable rate (see p. 3.1) has to be withheld on <i>rental income</i> (e.g. real estate). Tax Treaty may reduce the tax rate. Income tax at the rate of 10% has to be withheld on <i>royalty payments</i> . Tax Treaty may reduce the withholding tax rate	Certain gain from transfer of property may be subject to taxation in Estonia, e.g. the gain from transfer of immovable property located in Estonia
Payments to non-resident company	Income tax at the applicable rate (see p. 3.1) has to be withheld on <i>rental income</i> (e.g. real-estate). Tax Treaty may reduce the tax rate. Income tax at the rate of 10% has to be withheld on <i>Royalty payments</i> . Tax Treaty may reduce the withholding tax rate. Tax consequences may also arise according to transfer pricing rules if the value of the transaction does not correspond to market conditions. Withholding taxes can be avoided if the transaction is carried out between related parties and the conditions set out in the Income Tax Act are fulfilled	Gain from transfer of property might be subject to taxation in Estonia, e.g. the gain from transfer of immovable property located in Estonia. Tax consequences may arise also according to <i>transfer pricing</i> rules, if the value of the transaction does not correspond to market conditions
Interest paid to non-resident	Interest is subject to taxation only if the interest paid among related parties differs from the market interest rate on similar debt obligation	Interest is subject to taxation only if the interest paid among related parties differs from the market interest rate on similar debt obligation

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