

The Netherlands Commercial Court holds its first hearing!

Written by Georgia Antonopoulou and Xandra Kramer, Erasmus University Rotterdam (PhD candidate and PI ERC consolidator project Building EU Civil Justice)

Only six weeks after its establishment, the Netherlands Commercial Court (NCC) held its first hearing today, 18 February 2019 (see our previous post on the creation of the NCC). The NCC's maiden case *Elavon Financial Services DAC v. IPS Holding B.V. and others* was heard in summary proceedings and concerned an application for court permission to sell pledged shares (see here). The application was filed on 11 February and the NCC set the hearing date one week later, thereby demonstrating its commitment to offer a fast and efficient forum for international commercial disputes.

The parties' contract entailed a choice of forum clause in favour of the court in Amsterdam. However, according to the new Article 30r (1) of the Dutch Code of Civil Procedure and Article 1.3.1. of the NCC Rules an action may be initiated in the NCC if the Amsterdam District Court has jurisdiction to hear the action and the parties have expressly agreed in writing to litigate in English before the NCC. Lacking an agreement in the initial contract, the parties in *Elavon Financial Services DAC v. IPS Holding B.V.* subsequently agreed by separate agreement to bring their case before the newly established chamber and thus to litigate in English, bearing the NCC's much higher, when compared to the regular Dutch courts, fees. Unlike other international commercial courts which during their first years of functioning were 'fed' with cases transferred from other domestic courts or chambers, the fact that the parties in the present case directly chose the NCC is a positive sign for the court's future case flow.

As we have reported on this blog before, the NCC is a specialized chamber of the Amsterdam District Court, established on 1 January 2019. It has jurisdiction in international civil and commercial disputes, on the basis of a choice of court agreement. The entire proceedings are in English, including the pronouncement of the judgment. Judges have been selected from the Netherlands on the basis of their extensive experience with international commercial cases and English

language skills. The Netherlands Commercial Court of Appeal (NCCA) complements the NCC on appeal. Information on the NCC, a presentation of the court and the Rules of Procedure are available on the website of the Dutch judiciary. It advertises the court well, referring to “the reputation of the Dutch judiciary, which is ranked among the most efficient, reliable and transparent worldwide. And the Netherlands - and Amsterdam in particular - are a prime location for business, and a gateway to Europe.” Since a number of years, the Dutch civil justice system has been ranked no. 1 in the WJP Rule of Law Index.

In part triggered by the uncertainties of Brexit and the impact this may have on the enforcement of English judgments in Europe in particular, more and more EU Member States have established or are about to establish international commercial courts with a view to accommodating and attracting high-value commercial disputes (see also our previous posts [here](#) and [here](#)). Notable similar initiatives in Europe are the ‘Frankfurt Justice Initiative’ (for previous posts see [here](#) and [here](#)) and the Brussels International Business Court (see [here](#)). While international commercial courts are mushrooming in Europe, a proposal for a European Commercial Court has also come to the fore so as to effectively compete with similar courts outside Europe (see [here](#) and [here](#)).