The ECJ on the notion of “ancillary matter” for the purposes of the rules on jurisdiction of the Maintenance Regulation

This post has been written by Ester di Napoli.

On 16 July 2015, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) rendered its judgment in the case of *A* v. *B* (C-184/14), clarifying the interpretation of Regulation No 4/2009 on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition and enforcement of decisions and cooperation in matters relating to maintenance obligations (the Maintenance Regulation).

More specifically, the ruling regarded the interpretation of Article 3 of the Regulation. This provides, *inter alia*, that jurisdiction in matters of maintenance lies with “(c) the court which, according to its own law, has jurisdiction to entertain proceedings concerning the status of a person if the matter relating to maintenance is ancillary to those proceedings, unless that jurisdiction is based solely on the nationality of one of the parties”, or with “(d) the court which, according to its own law, has jurisdiction to entertain proceedings concerning parental responsibility if the matter relating to maintenance is ancillary to those proceedings, unless that jurisdiction is based solely on the nationality of one of the parties”.

The dispute in the main proceedings concerned the legal separation of two Italians and the custody of their children. These proceedings had been brought by A (the husband) against B (the wife) before the District Court of Milan.

The Court of Milan asserted its jurisdiction in respect of legal separation relying on Article 3(1)(b) of Regulation No 2201/2003 (Brussels II*a*), but held that, pursuant to Article 8(1) of that Regulation, it lacked jurisdiction over parental responsibility, as the children were, at the material time, habitually resident in the UK. The Court of Milan further held that, according to Article 3(c) and (d) of the Maintenance Regulation, it had jurisdiction to decide on the issue of maintenance for the benefit of the wife, but not to decide on maintenance for

the benefit of the children, since the latter request was not ancillary to proceedings over personal status, but to proceedings concerning parental responsibility.

The case eventually reached the Italian Supreme Court, which decided to request the ECJ for a preliminary ruling. The Supreme Court asked whether, in circumstances such as those described above, a maintenance request pertaining to the child may be ruled on both by the court that has jurisdiction over legal separation or divorce, as a matter ancillary to the proceedings concerning the status of a person, within the meaning of Article 3(c) of that Regulation, and by the court that has jurisdiction to entertain the proceedings concerning parental responsibility, as a matter ancillary to those proceedings, within the meaning of Article 3(d) of that Regulation; *or* whether a decision on a similar matter can only be taken by the latter court.

Put otherwise, the issue was whether the heads of jurisdiction set out in Article 3(c) and (d) of the Maintenance Regulation must be understood to be mutually exclusive, or whether the conjunction "or" in the provision implies that the courts that have jurisdiction over legal separation and parental responsibility may be both validly seised of an application relating to maintenance in respect of children.

In its judgment, the ECJ begins by observing that the scope of the concept of "ancillary matter" cannot be left to the discretion of the courts of each Member State according to their national law. The meaning of this expression should rather be determined by reference to the wording of the relevant provisions, their context and goals.

The wording of Article 3(c) and (d) indicates that a distinction should be made between proceedings concerning the *status* of a person and proceedings concerning parental responsibility. In the face of this wording, it cannot be unequivocally established "whether the alternative nature of those criteria means that the applications relating to child maintenance are ancillary only to one set of proceedings concerning parental responsibility, or whether those applications may be deemed ancillary also to proceedings concerning the status of a person".

As regards the context of the pertinent provisions, the ECJ notes that the above distinction echoes the distinction made by the Brussels II*a*

Regulation between disputes concerning divorce, legal separation and marriage annulment, on the one hand, and disputes regarding the attribution, exercise, delegation, and restriction or termination of parental responsibility, on the other. The ECJ further notes in this connection, based on Recital 12 of the preamble of the latter Regulation, that the rules on jurisdiction relating to parental responsibility underlie a concern for the best interests of the child, and adds that "an application relating to maintenance in respect of minor children is … intrinsically linked to proceedings concerning matters of parental responsibility".

The ECJ concludes that "it is vital to take into account, in interpreting the rules on jurisdiction laid down by Article 3(c) and (d) of Regulation No 4/2009, the best interest of the child", and that the implementation of such Regulation "must occur in accordance to Article 24(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union", according to which, in all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.

Finally, as regards the goals of the provisions at stake, the Court considers that the main objective of the Maintenance Regulation is to ensure, in this field, the proper administration of justice within the EU. This implies that the court to which jurisdiction is conferred to decide on parental responsibility should be the court that finds itself "in the best position to evaluate *in concreto* the issues involved in the application relating to child maintenance, to set the amount of that maintenance intended to contribute to the child's maintenance and education costs, by adapting it, according to (i) the type of custody (either jointly or sole) ordered, (ii) access rights and the duration of those rights and (iii) other factual elements relating to the exercise of parental responsibility brought before it".

In light of the above, the ECJ concludes that, when the court of a Member State is seised of proceedings concerning legal separation or divorce between the parents of a minor child, and the court of another Member State is seised of proceedings involving matters of parental responsibility over the same child, Article 3(c) and (d) of Regulation No 4/2009 must be interpreted as meaning that "an application relating to maintenance concerning that child is ancillary only to the proceedings concerning parental responsibility, with the meaning of Article 3(d) of that Regulation".

Dornis on the Local Data Theory in European Private International Law

Professor Dr. *Tim W. Dornis*, who teaches law at the Leuphana University (Lüneburg/Germany), has published a very interesting article on the application of the local data theory in European private international law in the Swiss Review of International and European Law (SZIER/RSDIE): *Tim W. Dornis*, Die Theorie der local data: dogmatische Bruchstelle im klassischen IPR, SZIER/RSDIE 25 (2015), p. 183. The author has kindly provided us with the following English summary:

"Quite often, the applicable law in international torts is not the law of the place where the tortfeasor acted. Indeed, both article 17 of Rome II and article 142 of the Swiss PIL provide for a consideration of "local rules of safety and conduct" instead of an application of the *lex causae*. Nevertheless, many questions around this so-called local-data doctrine remain unanswered—in particular, the distinction between rules that are "strictly territorial" and rules that are deemed to allow for more "flexibility" is problematic.

An oft-enunciated illustration of the first category is a traffic accident between two German tourists in England. While the German *lex domicilii communis* may be applied with respect to the liability of the tortfeasor, the English rule of driving on the left side of the street must provide for the standard of conduct. Of course, the tortfeasor cannot claim that he was acting in accordance with German traffic laws while driving his car in England. An example of the second, more flexible category can be found in rules on alcohol limits. These rules are supposed to be more adaptable insofar as parties from the same country are able to 'carry' their *lex communis* with them into a foreign jurisdiction.

If agreement exists—and it does—that considering local data serves lawmakers' concern for maintaining the local order, this differentiation is questionable. Don't

alcohol limits also promote the safety of local traffic? A closer look at these and other problems reveals that the issue of local data lies at the heart of a debate confronting European choice of law in the Savignian tradition: the discussion on the interrelation between substantive justice and conflicts justice. As this article suggests, a more policy-oriented view allows for modest changes in the categorization of local rules of safety and conduct. This ultimately paves the way for consistent and practically workable results."

Second Issue of 2015's Rivista di diritto internazionale privato e processuale

(I am grateful to Prof. Francesca Villata – University of Milan – for the following presentation of the latest issue of the RDIPP)

The second issue of 2015 of the Rivista di diritto internazionale privato e processuale (RDIPP, published by CEDAM) was just released. It features one article and two comments.

In her article *Costanza Honorati*, Professor at the University of Milano-Bicocca, examines the issue of child abduction under the Brussels IIa Regulation in "**La prassi italiana sul ritorno del minore sottratto ai sensi dell'art. 11 par. 8 del regolamento Bruxelles II-bis**" (Italian Practice on the Return of the Abducted Child Pursuant to Art. 11(8) of the Brussels IIa Regulation; in Italian).

> *The vast majority of return applications filed with the Italian Central Authority under the 1980 Hague Convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction concern children who are habitually resident in Italy and have been wrongfully removed to a foreign State (so-called "outgoing cases"). Therefore, it is not surprising that some of the foreign decisions refusing to return a child on the grounds of Article 13(1)b of the Convention were challenged before Italian courts with the special procedure provided under Article 11(8) of the Brussels*

IIa Regulation. Indeed, Italy stands out as one of the very few EU States that provide some case law on Article 11(8) of the Brussels IIa Regulation. However, it does come as a surprise that in most of these cases Italian courts, after a thorough analysis of the facts, including what was produced in the foreign proceedings, have confirmed the foreign non-return order and dismissed the request for return. In fact, only in a small number of cases the court has found the foreign decision to be ill-founded and has adopted a «trumping» return order. The present article aims at reviewing and analysing both groups of decisions, showing, on one side, how the time factor is often crucial and rightly kept into consideration by the court of habitual residence when deciding for non-return. On the other side, time is of the essence also in cases where the court of habitual residence orders for the children to be returned. When such order is not complied with or enforced in a very short time, it is here assumed that best interest of the child would call for a subsequent review of the decision rendered by the court of the place of the child's habitual residence.

In addition to the foregoing, the following comments are also featured:

Elisabetta Bergamini, Associate Professor at the University of Udine, discusses status of children in a private international law perspective in "**Problemi di diritto internazionale privato collegati alla riforma dello status di figlio e questioni aperte**" (Questions of Private International Law Related to the Status of Children and Open Issues; in Italian).

This paper examines the Italian law reforming the status of children (Law No 219/2012), which finally abolished all discriminations between children born in and out of wedlock, and the consequences such abolishment entails at a private international law level. The first part of the paper analyses the reform, its principles and the problems related to the definition of the rules on the unity of the status of the child as "overriding mandatory provisions". The second part tackles some of the most relevant unsolved problems related to children status, such as the establishment of the parental link in case of medically assisted reproduction, the regime applicable to surrogate motherhood, and the legal vacuums affecting children of same-sex couples. In this regard, particular attention is paid to the Italian case-law, as well as its relationship with the ECtHR and the EU case-law, and to the possible solutions to the non-recognition of the personal status acquired in a foreign country.

Silvia Marino, Researcher at the University of Insubria, tackles choice-of-court agreements in parental responsibility matters in "**La portata della proroga del foro nelle controversie sulla responsabilità genitoriale**" (The Scope of Choice-of-Court Agreements in Disputes over Parental Responsibility; in Italian).

> *This article examines two recent judgments of the European Court of Justice concerning choice of forum in matters related to parental responsibility. These decisions offer the opportunity to reflect on the pre-conditions for the validity of the choice of forum clause, i.e. the agreement, the proximity, the interest of the child and the connection with another proceeding, and the relationships between different bases of jurisdiction (habitual residence and forum non conveniens). Analysing the peculiar facts of the cases and the clarifications provided by the ECJ, the article tackles those pre-conditions from a practical and concrete standpoint with a view to understanding when and how the different bases of jurisdiction can be used. Some final considerations are devoted to the concrete range of the choice of the parties.*

Indexes and archives of RDIPP since its establishment (1965) are available on the website of the Rivista di diritto internazionale privato e processuale. This issue is available for download on the publisher's website.

Gedächtnisschrift for Hannes Unberath

The publishing house C.H. Beck has recently released the "Gedächtnisschrift für Hannes Unberath". Edited by Stefan Arnold and Stephan Lorenz the volume contains, among others, four German language contributions relating to private international law and international civil procedure:

- *Frank Bauer,* Art. 59 EuErbVO: Verfahrensrechtliche Kollisionsnorm zur Sicherung des freien Verkehrs öffentlicher Urkunden (pp. 19 ff.)
- *Wolfgang Hau,* Zivilsachen mit grenzüberschreitendem Bezug (pp. 139 ff.)

- *Peter Kindler,* Der europäische Vertragsgerichtsstand beim Warenkauf im Lichte der Rechtsprechung des Europäischen Gerichtshofes (pp. 253 ff.)
- *Gerald Mäsch,* Patrick Battistons Jackettkronen und das Kollisionsrecht, oder: Das Deliktsstatut bei Verletzungen im Rahmen von internationalen Sportgroßveranstaltungen (pp. 303 ff.)

For more information see the publisher's website.

It's Taken 15 Years...

...For the Spanish lawmaker to fulfill the promise, made in 2000, of a *Ley de cooperación juridical internacional en material civil.*

The new Act can be downloaded here. It will come into force in twenty days.

Many thanks to Dr. Cristian Oró for the hint.

Out now: The Counterclaim in the Civil Procedural Law of the European Union and its Member States

Dr. *Agnieszka Okonska*, LL.M. (Leipzig), has just published a monumental comparative study on "The Counterclaim in the Civil Procedural Law of the European Union and its Member States" (Die Widerklage im Zivilprozessrecht der Europäischen Union und ihrer Mitgliedstaaten, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2015, XLVI, 672 pages; Veröffentlichungen zum Verfahrensrecht Vol. 118, € 99.00). The laws on civil procedure of all European Union member states and the contracting states of the Lugano Convention are familiar with the counterclaim. *Agnieszka Okonska* examines meticulously the interaction between national provisions and those contained in the EU Regulations on counterclaims (the Brussels I*bis* Regulation, Small Claims Regulation and the Maintenance Regulation). The author identifies pervasive conflicts and offers solutions to them. Her analysis is based on a thorough comparative analysis of various European legal orders, in particular Germany, Austria, France, England and Poland. The author also looks at the counterclaim in public international and ecclesiastical law. Her study was accepted by the law faculty of the University of Trier as a doctoral dissertation "summa cum laude" under the supervision of Professor Dr. *Jan von Hein* (now University of Freiburg/Germany). For further information, see here.

General Principles of Law: European and Comparative Perspectives – Celebrating 20 Years of the Institute of European and Comparative Law at the University of Oxford

The Institute of European and Comparative Law at the University of Oxford is organising a conference on "General Principles of Law: European and Comparative Perspectives" that will be held at St Anne's College Oxford and the

Mathematical Institute, University of Oxford, on 25-26 September 2015.

The description of the conference on the Institute's website reads as follows:

" 'General principles of law' are one of the most visible areas of intersection between EU law and comparative law: as long as they are understood as 'the general principles common to the laws of the Member States' (Art 340(2) TFEU) their fleshing out requires careful comparative preparatory work. True, more often than not, the general principles of EU law were not developed on the basis of thorough and textbook style analysis. This does not make it less interesting to look at the interaction of EU law and comparative law in this particular field. Those working together in elaborating general principles of EU law tend to be responsive to input from national laws, and the laws of the Member States have no choice but to be responsive to the general principles developed at EU level.

It is the purpose of this conference to look at this particular interaction from the perspectives of EU law and comparative law alike. Leading scholars and practitioners from both fields will come together to discuss the most recent developments in the field.

The conference will be held on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Oxford Institute. It will bring together current and former members, visitors and friends of the Institute, as well as those who might belong to one of these categories in the future. Celebration will be an essential part of the proceedings!"

Further information, including the full programme and registration details can be found here.

Update: International Conference at the Academy of European Law:

“How to handle international commercial cases – Hands-on experience and current trends”

It has already been announced on this blog that the Academy of European Law (ERA) will host an international, English-language conference on recent experience and current trends in international commercial litigation, with a special focus on European private international law (see our earlier post here). The event will take place in Trier (Germany), on 8-9 October 2015. A slightly revised programme has now been put online and is available here. Registration is still possible here – so don’t miss the early bird rebate (before 8 September 2015)!

Workshop on General Principles of European Private International Law in Munich

Professor Dr. *Stefan Arnold* (University of Graz, Austria) is organising a workshop on general principles of European private international law in Munich on 18 September 2015. Renowned speakers will deal with pervasive problems such as the notion of a family in PIL, the applicability of religious law, general principles of attachment, party autonomy, renvoi and public policy. The programme may be downloaded here. The conference will be held in German at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. Participation is free of charge, but prior registration is required here.

One Name throughout Europe: A Conference in Marburg (Germany) on a Draft for a European Regulation on the Law Applicable to Names

Professors *Anatol Dutta* (University of Regensburg), *Tobias Helms* (University of Marburg) and *Walter Pintens* (University of Leuven) are organising a conference on a draft for a European regulation on the law applicable to names in Marburg (Germany) on Friday, 27 November 2015; for the programme, further information and registration, see here. The background of this event lies in the fact that, in spite of the far-reaching Europeanization of private international law, common conflicts rules on this matter are currently lacking. As a consequence, natural persons moving from one Member State to another may suffer from a non-recognition of a name that they have acquired abroad. In order to cure those "limping" legal relationships, a Working Group was convened by the Federal Association of German Civil Status Registrars in order to elaborate a proposal for a European Regulation. The resulting proposal has been published in English in the Yearbook of Private International Law XV (2013/14), pp. 31-37 and in French in the Revue critique de droit international privé 2014, pp. 733 et seq. The aim of the upcoming conference is to present and analyse the Working Group's proposal and to trigger further academic discussion on the subject. The conference language will be German. Participation is free of charge, but registration is required before or on 31 October 2015 at the latest.