

# French Supreme Court Rules on Scope of Rome II Regulation

The French supreme court for private and criminal matters (*Cour de cassation*) ruled on the respective scopes of the 1971 Hague Convention on the law applicable to traffic accidents and the Rome II Regulation in a judgment of 30 April 2014.

In 2010, a traffic accident occurred in Spain involving two cars. The first was registered in France, the second in Spain. The passenger of the French car initiated proceedings in France against the driver of the same car.


The lower courts found that both parties had their habitual residence in France and that French law thus governed as a consequence of Article 4(2) of the Rome II Regulation. In order to avoid applying the 1971 Hague Convention, to which France is a party, the court of appeal ruled that both France and Spain were members of the EU, and that the Rome II Regulation thus prevailed over conventions entered into by the Member States (article 28(2)).

The French Supreme court sets aside the judgment on the ground that Article 28 of the Rome II Regulation expressly provides that international conventions prevail over the Rome II Regulation when they were also ratified by third states. As it is the case for the 1971 Hague Convention, the latter should have been applied.

Under Articles 3 and 4 of the 1971 Hague Convention, when the traffic accident involves cars registered in different states, the law of the place of accident, here Spain, applies.

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# Greek Commentary on the Rome II Regulation

The first Greek Commentary on the Rome II Regulation edited by Prof. Dr.  Angelos Bolos (Panteion University) and Dr. Dimitrios-Panagiotis Tzakas was just published.

This collective work undertakes an in-depth analysis on the specific provisions of Regulation No 864/2007 (Rome II) and scrutinizes its doctrinal implications with regard to the existing CJEU case law, especially on the Brussels I Regulation. Furthermore, attention is paid to the impact of the Rome II Regulation on sectors characterized by specificities which are not addressed by specific choice-of-law rules (i.e. traffic accidents, capital markets law etc.).

The contributors (V. Athanassopoulou, A. Emilianides, Th. Katsas, V. Koumpli, E. Liaskos, A. Metallinos, A. Bolos, K. Noussia, A. Papadelli, E. Spinellis, T.-E. Synodinou, D.P. Tzakas) give particular consideration to the ongoing Europeanization in the fields of the Private International Law and highlight its implications for the jurisprudence of the Hellenic courts after the enactment of a new set of choice-of-law rules.

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## Tick Tock: CJEU rules on temporal application of the Rome II Regulation

On 17 November 2011, the Court of Justice of the European Union delivered its ruling in Case C-412/10, *Homawoo v GMF Assurances* on the temporal effect of the Rome II Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 864/2007). In line with the earlier opinion (if not all of the reasoning) of Advocate General Mengozzi, the Court rules that the date of application of the Rome II Regulation is fixed by Art. 32 of the

Regulation at 11 January 2009, with the consequence that the Regulation will apply only to events giving rise to damage occurring from that date (Art. 31).

The terms of the Court's ruling are as follows:

*Articles 31 and 32 of Regulation (EC) No 864/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2007 on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations ('Rome II'), read in conjunction with Article 297 TFEU, must be interpreted as requiring a national court to apply the Regulation only to events giving rise to damage occurring after 11 January 2009 and that the date on which the proceedings seeking compensation for damage were brought or the date on which the applicable law was determined by the court seised have no bearing on determining the scope ratione temporis of the Regulation.*

Although differing from my own view, influenced by the legislative history of Arts 31 and 32, the Court's reasoning is quite convincing. The swift and decisive settlement of this point of controversy, just over a year after the reference, is to be welcomed.

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## **European Parliament's Working Document on the Amendment of the Rome II Regulation**

On May 25, 2011, the Committee of Legal Affairs (Rapporteur: Diane Wallis) of the European Parliament has issued a Working Document on the amendment of Regulation (EC) No 864/2007 on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations (Rome II). The Working Paper discusses the desirability to fill the gap in the Regulation on the applicable law to non-contractual obligations arising out of violations of privacy and rights relating to personality.

Readers will recall that *Conflictolaws.Net* had organized an online symposium on

this topic last summer. We are delighted that the Rapporteur found the contributions “thoughtful and thought-provoking”, although the range of views expressed had made her task no easier. The Rapporteur made particular mention of the proposal of Professor Jan von Hein, indicating that she found his approach “balanced and reasonable”.

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## **Tick, Tock: Temporal Application of the Rome II Regulation Referred to the CJEU**

Two recent decisions of the English High Court consider the temporal effect of the Rome II Regulation, with the first of these making a reference to the CJEU as to the combined effect of Articles 31-32 of the Regulation (to my knowledge, the first reference with respect to this Regulation).

Each of the cases (*Homawoo v GMF Assurance SA* [2010] EWHC 1941 (QB) and *Bacon v Nacional Suiza* [2010] EWHC 1941 (QB)) concerned proceedings with respect to injuries suffered by the claimant in a road traffic accident occurring (a) in a Member State (France in *Homawoo* and Spain in *Bacon*) and (b) in 2007 (but in each case after 20 August, the first critical date in terms of defining the temporal effect of the Regulation). In each case, proceedings were issued in England before 9 January 2009 (the second critical date). In *Bacon*, the sole defendant was the insurer of the only car involved in the accident (Mr Bacon was a pedestrian). In *Homawoo*, although the driver and owner of the car causing injury were also joined, proceedings were only pursued against the insurer. Liability was disputed (successfully) in *Bacon*, but accepted in *Homawoo*.

The question for decision by each of Sharp J (*Homawoo*) and Tomlinson J (*Bacon*) was whether the Rome II Regulation applied, with the result that damages would fall to be assessed by reference to the law applicable under the Regulation (French or Spanish law) and not the law of the forum (cf. *Harding v Wealands*

[2007] 1 AC 1, under the pre-existing English rules of applicable law).

Under Article 31 of the Rome II Regulation, the Regulation “shall apply to events giving rise to damage which occur after its entry into force”. Under Article 32, the Regulation (with the sole exception of Article 29) “shall apply from 11 January 2009”. This combination clearly suggests, as both judges accepted, a distinction between the date of entry into force of the Regulation and its date of application, with only the latter being specifically designated in Article 32 (9 January 2009). If that view, supported by records of the discussions in the Council’s Rome II working group, is accepted as representing the legislative intention of the EU, it would seem to follow that the date of entry into force must be fixed at 20 August 2007 in accordance with Article 254 of the EC Treaty (now TFEU, Article 297).

Nevertheless, an important conundrum remains to be resolved, in that the precise meaning of the words “shall apply” in Articles 31 and 32 must be explained: What is it to which the Regulation’s rules of applicable law “shall apply”?

Needless to say, given the unsatisfactory drafting, commentators differ in their approaches (for my own, see Dickinson, *The Rome II Regulation* (2008), paras 3.315-3.321), as did the two judges in these cases.

In *Homawoo*, Sharp J (at [43]-[49]) was unhappy with interpretations of Article 32 as referring to the date of commencement of legal proceedings or the date of determination of those proceedings. She suggested (at [50]) that a reading of Articles 31 and 32 as inter-linking and complete in themselves so that the Regulation would apply only to events giving rise to damage after 11 January 2009 “would give legal certainty”, but accepted that the “clear language of Article 31” made it impossible to reach this conclusion, at least without a preliminary reference to the CJEU. Accordingly (at [51]) she posed the following questions:

*If the meaning and effect of Article 31 is that Rome II is to apply to events giving rise to damage which occur after the ‘entry into force’ of the Regulation on 20th August 2007, what is the meaning and effect of ‘shall apply from 11th January 2009’ in Article 32? Is it ‘apply to proceedings commenced’ or ‘apply to determination by a court’ after that date? What is the meaning and effect of Article 31? Should it be interpreted so that the Regulation shall apply to events giving rise to damage which occur on or after 11th January 2009?*

In Bacon, it was not necessary for Tomlinson finally to decide the temporal application point or to consider whether to make a reference, as he had held the claimant on the facts solely responsible for the accident and exonerated the defendant under Spanish law, which it was agreed applied to the question of liability in any event. Nevertheless, having heard arguments similar to those advanced before Sharp J, he concluded (at [61]) that the Regulation applied to the determination as from 11 January 2009 of the law applicable to a non-contractual obligation arising out of an event giving rise to damage on or after 20 August 2007.

Although Sharp J (at [46]) had observed that parties who are considering the possibility of settlement will wish to understand what law applies to the calculation of damages and they (like judges) need to know whether Rome II applies, Tomlinson J took the view (I would submit, correctly) that the Regulation is directed at the Member States and their courts (see [61]). This is not to deny that the Regulation's provisions are not relevant in calculating the parameters of settlement, but merely to accept that the parameters of settlement must themselves be calculated by reference to a hypothetical future determination by a court or tribunal having jurisdiction over the matter. Settlement discussions, as other commercial negotiations, are conducted by reference to the putatively applicable law, and in cross-border transactions it must be accepted that the rights and obligations of the parties may fall to be determined at different times and by different courts or tribunals according to different legal rules.

On the view taken by Tomlinson J (according with the wording and legislative history of Articles 31-32) the likely date of any future judicial determination was a factor which those negotiating settlements in the EU before 11 January 2009 would need to take into account, alongside such other factors as the identity and geographical location (within or outside a Member State) of the court(s) or tribunal(s) before which the matter could be brought if their negotiations were not to bear fruit. That is not illogical or unjust (see Tomlinson J, at [38]). Nor does it involve giving retroactive effect to the Regulation's provisions, which were published in the Official Journal on 31 July 2007. Nor, at the point of determination, does it result in any uncertainty as to the source of the rules of applicable law that the court must apply. Further, as Tomlinson J pointed out (at [65]), the opportunity for taking any tactical advantage of the separation of entry into force and application of the Regulation ended (if this interpretation is

accepted) on 11 January 2009, following which any determination by a Member State court of the law applicable to a non-contractual obligation must be carried out in accordance with the Regulation's rules. From that date, the Regulation (at least according to its major objective) promotes a different kind of certainty (decisional harmony), in ensuring that Member State courts apply the same law in the determination of non-contractual obligations, even if the event giving rise to damage occurred between 20 August 2007 and 11 January 2009. The harmonisation of approach in this area across the Member States is, of course, the primary objective of the Rome II Regulation (see Recitals (6) and (15)) and this interpretation appears, therefore, teleologically superior, even if it leads to a short term problem (now expired) in terms of the foreseeability of court decisions (see Recital (16)).

In any event, it may be questioned whether the form of "legal certainty" craved by Sharp J and other proponents of this solution is of any significant or lasting value. The very fact of a reference to the CJEU on this point (and the contrary view of Tomlinson J and many others) will leave those engaging in settlement discussions with respect to events occurring between 20 August 2007 and 11 January 2009 in doubt as to the source of the rules for determining the law applicable to the parties' non-contractual obligations for years to come. By the time that we have a firm answer, the large majority of cases (particularly those involving traffic accidents) will likely have settled notwithstanding that doubt (unpredictability of outcome may even be seen as a driver of settlement). If the CJEU follows the view of Tomlinson J, as I would submit that it should, all those whose claims remain (and those whose claims remain undiscovered) will know where they stand, even if the events on which the claim is based occurred in the interregnum. As decisional harmony will (or ought to) have been improved, even in the latter class of cases, so too the incentive for one party to upset settlement discussions by rushing off to bring proceedings in a Member State court that it considers will apply a favourable law will (or ought to) have been diminished. We will all, according to the tin, be better off.


It is suggested that, what at first sight may appear an awkward or "arbitrary" (Tomlinson J, at [38]) combination of provisions in Articles 31 and 32, is in fact a combination of puritanism and pragmatism. The authors of the Regulation, in their unremitting quest to harmonise the rules of European private international law, were anxious that their new creation should be vivified at the earliest

opportunity. That, however posed a problem in that the objectives of the Regulation might be put at risk if the creature's handlers (Member State judges) were not trained as to how to use it, with the result that a period of education was built in. The modified prospective effect of the Regulation can be seen, therefore, as an attempt to resolve the conflict between the ideals of a single area of justice and the reality of twenty six different ones.

The significance of questions of temporal effect will, of course, fade over time as claims are resolved and new ones arise. In a few years, we may all be better off and wonder what the excitement was about, although Mr Homawoo, Mr Bacon and others in their position may question exactly what they have found themselves in the middle of.

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## **Dickinson on The Rome II Regulation: Supplement Now Available**

Andrew Dickinson's monograph on **The Rome II Regulation - The Law  Applicable to Non-Contractual Obligations** was published in December 2008, and subsequent contributions from courts and academics have been seen throughout 2009 and 2010. To ensure that his work stays up-to-date and comprehensive, Dickinson has published an **Updating Supplement** to accompany the monograph. From the OUP website:

- This supplement updates *The Rome II Regulation: The Law Applicable to Non-Contractual Obligations*, which is the leading practitioner work which focuses on the Rome II regulation
- This supplement incorporates all major substantive developments since publication of the Main Work in December 2008 including the implementation of the Regulation in the UK, recent ECJ cases concerning other EC private international law instruments and new decisions of the



## English courts concerning the pre-Regulation rules of applicable law

*Written by an experienced practitioner, who had substantial involvement in the consultation process leading to the regulation, offering valuable insight into the background and working of the regulation*

*This updating supplement brings the Main Work The Rome II Regulation up to date and incorporates substantive developments since publication of the book in December 2008. In particular it draws attention to legislation implementing the Regulation in the United Kingdom, to recent ECJ cases concerning other EC private international law instruments, to new decisions of the English courts concerning the pre-Regulation rules of applicable law, and to recent books and journal articles providing further colour to the picture surrounding the Regulation since its adoption in January 2009. It is an essential purchase for all who already own the Main Work, and maintains its currency.*

You can buy the main work together with the commentary for £200, or just the supplement for £45.

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# **Bertoli: Party Autonomy and the Rome II Regulation**

*Paolo Bertoli* (University of Insubria) has published two interesting articles (in English) on the role of party autonomy in the Rome II regulation. Here are the references:

**Choice of Law by the Parties in the Rome II Regulation**, in *Rivista di diritto internazionale*, 2009, pp. 697-716.

**Party Autonomy and Choice-Of-Law Methods in the “Rome II” Regulation on the Law Applicable to Non-Contractual Obligations**, in *Il Diritto dell’Unione europea*, 2009, pp. 229-264.


An abstract has been kindly provided by the author:

*The articles discuss, also in comparison with American private international law theories and methods, the innovative provisions relating to party autonomy set forth in the EC “Rome II” regulation on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations, the choice-of-law methods that such provisions follow, and their role and significance in the framework of the European “federalized” private international law system. In particular, the articles demonstrate that a distinction can, and should, be made between cases in which party autonomy operates in the context, and demonstrates the existence in Rome II, of: (i) a traditional (or, in American terminology, “jurisdiction-selecting”) choice-of-law method, (ii) a “content-oriented” choice-of-law method, and (iii) a European *lex fori* approach.*

With reference to the development of EC private international law, see also the author’s thorough analysis of the role of the European Court of Justice, in his volume “Corte di giustizia, integrazione comunitaria e diritto internazionale privato e processuale” (Giuffrè, 2005) and “The Court of Justice, European Integration and Private International Law” (in *Yearbook of Private International Law*, vol. VIII-2006, pp. 375-412: the article can be browsed through the Libreka! website).

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## **Dickinson: Rome II Regulation Monograph Supplement, and our New Consultant Editor**

Scholarly writings on the new Rome II Regulation have continued to pour in  from all Member States, and the ECJ’s recent case law on other civil justice instruments (particularly the Brussels I Regulation) has also addressed issues of relevance to Rome II. For the time being, national courts have had little opportunity to consider the Rome II Regulation, but that will no doubt soon

change. Andrew Dickinson's monograph - The Rome II Regulation - The Law Applicable to Non-Contractual Obligations - was published on 18th December 2008, and will undoubtedly be a source of valuable guidance for practitioners and academics for some time to come. To ensure that it remains up to date, however, Andrew Dickinson has committed to publishing supplements to the work. The first supplement, which runs to some 54 pages, is available on the companion website to the book and can be downloaded from **here (PDF)**. I would urge all those interested in Rome II to take advantage of it.

It will, following from the above, come as no surprise that I am delighted to announce that Andrew will be joining the Conflict of Laws .net team as a Consultant Editor, posting primarily on developments in European civil and commercial matters. A short biography appears below, and I am sure everyone who uses this site will be pleased that he will be contributing to the website on a regular basis.

## **Biography**

Andrew Dickinson is a solicitor advocate (qualified 1997; higher rights 2002),  consultant to Clifford Chance LLP and visiting fellow at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law.

Andrew is a member of the North Committee (the Ministry of Justice's advisory committee on private international law) and of the editorial board of the Journal of Private International Law. He has recently joined the editorial team of Dicey, Morris and Collins on the Conflict of Laws.

Andrew's main area of legal practice and research interest is private international law, but his practice also covers civil litigation, commercial and banking law and public international law. He is the author of *The Rome II Regulation: The Law Applicable to Non-Contractual Obligations* (OUP, 2008) ([romeii.eu](http://romeii.eu)), co-author of *State Immunity: Selected Materials and Commentary* (OUP, 2004) and an editor of the *International Commercial Litigation Handbook* (LexisNexis, 2006). His published papers include "European Private International Law: Embracing New Horizons or Mourning the Past?" (2005) 1 J Priv Int L 197 and "Third Country Mandatory Rules in the Law Applicable to Contractual Obligations: So Long, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehen, Adieu?" (2007) 3 J Priv Int L 53.

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# Rome II Regulation Applicable in EU

**Starting from today, 11 January 2009, Regulation no. 864/2007 on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations (Rome II) is applicable in the Member States** (see its Art. 32), excepting Denmark.

In the comments to one of our previous posts, some **debate was raised as to the proper construction of Art. 31 (“Application in time”) of the Regulation**, according to which the new regime applies to “events giving rise to damage which occur after its entry into force”. A very large majority of scholars (almost all the published articles) takes the view that, for the purposes of Art. 31, the date of entry into force coincides with the date of application of the Regulation, so that it would be applicable to events giving rise to damage occurring on or after 11 January 2009.

Other elements, taken from the legislative process (see the comments to the abovementioned post), would suggest the opposite view that, following the ordinary rules set by Art. 254(1) of the EC Treaty, the Regulation entered into force on 20 August 2007, thus applying to events occurred on or after this previous date. The latter interpretation is shared by the SCADplus (summary of EU legislation) webpage on Rome II, which holds no official value, and is referred to by Prof. *Hartley* in his article on the Rome II Reg. (“Choice of Law for Non-Contractual Liability: Selected Problems Under the Rome II Regulation“, in ICLQ (2008), p. 899 ff., at footnote 2 on p. 899, quoting Prof. *Morse* in *Dicey and Morris*).

Two others points are worth mentioning, as regards the final provisions of Rome II:

1. according to Art. 29(2), the Commission is expected to publish in the OJ the **list of existing international conventions** “to which one or more Member States are parties at the time when this Regulation is adopted and which lay down conflict-of-law rules relating to non-contractual obligations” (mainly, the 1971


Hague Convention on Traffic Accidents and the 1973 Hague Convention on Products Liability): the deadline for Member States to notify of such conventions was set to 11 July 2008. To my knowledge, the list has not yet been published;

2. according to the review clause in Art. 30(2), not later than 31 December 2008 **the Commission** was expected **to present a study** “on the situation **in the field of the law applicable to non-contractual obligations arising out of violations of privacy and rights relating to personality**, taking into account rules relating to freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the media, and conflict-of-law issues related to Directive 95/46/EC [...]”. Neither this study has been released, as yet, as far as I know.

Readers are encouraged to report on first cases of application of the new Regulation before national courts.

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## Publication: Dickinson on the Rome II Regulation

On 18th December 2008, Oxford University Press will publish Andrew  Dickinson's new work on **The Rome II Regulation - The Law Applicable to Non-Contractual Obligations**. Here's the blurb:

*Regulation (EC) No 864/2007 on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations (the so-called “Rome II Regulation”) is the product of almost 40-years work by the institutions and Member States of the European Community. From 11th January 2009, it will introduce an entirely new set of rules for determining the law applicable to non-contractual obligations (including tort/delict, unjust enrichment and some equitable obligations). This work, written by an experienced practitioner, provides a user-friendly article-by-article commentary to assist practising lawyers in understanding the structure and practical application of the Regulation. The book also considers the background to, and treaty base, of the Regulation and its relationship to other EC instruments creating or affecting rules of private international law. Links to*

*primary materials, news and updates will appear on the companion website at [www.romeii.eu](http://www.romeii.eu).*

You can also view a table of contents, as well as an endorsement from Lord Mance, on the OUP website.

Price: £145.00 (Hardback). ISBN: 978-0-19-928968-4. Andrew has kindly offered a **20% discount** for pre-publication orders to readers of Conflict of Laws .net (reducing the price from £145 to **£116**) - the code to enter is **ALCWDICK08**. Needless to say, it is *highly recommended*.