

# **Ssangyong Engineering & Construction Co. Ltd. v. National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) 2019 SCC OnLine SC 677**

*By Mohak Kapoor*

The recent decision of the apex court of Ssangyong Engineering & Construction Co. Ltd. v. NHAI, has led to three notable developments: (1) it clarifies the scope of the “public policy” ground for setting aside an award as amended by the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act 2015, (2) affirms the prospective applicability of the act and (3) adopts a peculiar approach towards recognition of minority decisions.

## **FACTS**

The dispute arose out of a contract concerning the construction of a four-lane bypass on a National Highway in the State of Madhya Pradesh, that was entered into by the parties. Under the terms of the contract, the appellant, Ssangyong Engineering, was to be compensated for inflation in prices of the materials that were required for the project. The agreed method of compensation for inflated prices was the Wholesale Price Index (“WPI”) following 1993 – 1994 as the base year. However, by way of a circular, the National Highways Authority of India (“NHAI”) changed the WPI to follow 2004 – 2005 as the base year for calculating the inflated cost to the dismay of Ssangyong. Hence, leading to the said dispute. .

After the issue was not resolved, the dispute was referred to a three member arbitral tribunal. The majority award upheld the revision of WPI as being within the terms of the contract. The minority decision opined otherwise, and held that the revision was out of the scope the said contract. Due to this, Ssangyong challenged the award as being against public policy before Delhi High Court and upon the dismissal of the same, the matter was brought in front of the apex court by way of an appeal.

## **LEGAL FINDINGS**

The Supreme Court ruled on various issues that were discussed during the proceedings of the matter. The Court held that an award would be against justice and morality when it shocks the conscience of the court. However, the same would be determined on a case to case basis.

The apex court interpreted and discussed the principles stipulated under the New York convention. Under Para 54 of the judgement, the apex court has discussed the necessity of providing the party with the appropriate opportunity to review the evidence against them and the material is taken behind the back of a party, such an instance would lead to arising of grounds under section 34(2)(a)(iii) of the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2015. In this case, the SC applied the principles under the New York convention of due process to set aside an award on grounds that one of the parties was not given proper chance of hearing. The court held that if the award suffers from patent illegality, such an award has to be set aside.

However, this ground may be invoked if (a) no reasons are given for an award, (b) the view taken by an arbitrator is an impossible view while construing a contract, (c) an arbitrator decides questions beyond a contract or his terms of reference, and (d) if a perverse finding is arrived at based on no evidence, or overlooking vital evidence, or based on documents taken as evidence without notice of the parties.

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**Work on possible future Private International Law instruments on legal parentage (incl. legal parentage established as a result of an international surrogacy arrangement) is making progress**

*Written by Mayela Celis*

The sixth meeting of the Experts' Group on Parentage / Surrogacy took place in late October & early November 2019 in The Hague, the Netherlands, and focused on proposing provisions for developing two HCCH instruments:

- a general private international law instrument (*i.e.* a Convention) on the recognition of foreign judicial decisions on legal parentage; and
- a separate protocol on the recognition of foreign judicial decisions on legal parentage rendered as a result of an international surrogacy arrangement.

As indicated in the HCCH news item, the Experts' Group also discussed the feasibility of making provisions in relation to applicable law rules and public documents.

At the outset, experts underlined "the pressing need for common internationally-agreed solutions to avoid limping legal parentage. The aim of any future instrument would be to provide predictability, certainty and continuity of legal parentage in international situations for all individual concerned, taking into account their rights, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and in particular the best interests of the child."

In relation to the recognition of judgments under the Convention, the Group studied both *indirect grounds of jurisdiction* (such as the child's habitual residence) and *grounds for refusal of recognition* (such as public policy and providing the child with an opportunity to be heard, which seems to me of paramount importance). Due to the fact that in the majority of cases legal parentage is not established by a judgment, other *Private International Law techniques* such as applicable law were also studied. In addition, the presumption of validity of legal parentage recorded in a public instrument issued by a designated competent authority was also considered by the experts. A comprehensive PIL instrument was also discussed.

Furthermore, to facilitate the recognition by operation of law of foreign judgments on legal parentage in international surrogacy arrangements, the Group considered possible criteria (*i.e.* minimum standards or safeguards to protect the rights and welfare of the parties involved, in particular the best interests of the child) that would need to be met. The Group also "discussed the possibility of certification (for example, by way of a model form) to verify that conditions under

the Protocol have been met.”

Given the controversial nature of international surrogacy arrangements, the Group stressed that *any future protocol on this issue should not be understood as supporting or opposing surrogacy*. The question of course remains whether States would be willing to join such an instrument and whether the international act of consenting to be bound by such an instrument on the international plane would signal a positive or negative approach to surrogacy arrangements by a specific State (and possibly result in a potential imbalance between national and international surrogacy arrangements *i.e.* the former being refused effect and the latter being recognised). The issue of domestic surrogacy arrangements still needs to be explored further by the Group (see para No 26 of the Report).

Moreover, an important feature of the work is the future relationship between the two draft instruments. In this regard, the Group noted that “In principle, the Group favoured an approach whereby States could choose to become a party to both instruments or only one of them. Some Experts proposed that consideration be given to possible mechanisms to serve as a bridge between the two instruments. Experts agreed that, at this time, the Group should continue its work by considering the draft instruments in parallel.”

The proposal is that the Group continues its work on these issues and that it reports to the governance body of the Hague Conference (HCCH) in **March 2022** so that this body can make a final decision on whether to proceed with this project.

The Report of the Experts’ Group is available [here](#).

The HCCH news item is available [here](#).

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## The CJEU renders its first decision

# on the EAPO Regulation - Case C-555/18

*Carlos Santaló Goris, Researcher at the Max Planck Institute Luxembourg for International, European and Regulatory Procedural Law, and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Luxembourg, offers a summary and an analysis of the CJEU Case C-555/18, K.H.K. v. B.A.C., E.E.K.*

## Introduction

On 7 November 2019, the CJEU released the very first decision on Regulation 655/2014 establishing a European Account Preservation Order (“EAPO Regulation”). From the perspective of European civil procedure, this instrument is threefold innovative. It is the first uniform provisional measure; it is also the very first *ex parte* piece of European civil procedure (and reverses the *Denilauer* doctrine); and the first one which, though indirectly, tackles civil enforcement of judicial decisions at European level. This preliminary reference made by a Bulgarian court gave the CJEU the opportunity to clarify certain aspects of the EAPO Regulation.

## Facts of the case

The main facts of the case were substantiated before the District Court of Sofia.

A creditor requested a Bulgarian payment order to recover certain debts. Simultaneously the creditor decided to request an EAPO in order to attach the defendants’ bank accounts in Sweden.

The payment order could not be served on the debtor because his domicile was unknown. In such cases, Bulgarian law prescribes that the debtor must initiate procedures on the substance of the case. If the creditor does not go ahead with such proceedings, the court would repeal/withdraw the payment order. The District Court of Sofia informed the creditor about this, urging the initiation of the proceedings. At the same time, the District Court of Sofia referred to the President of the District Court of Sofia for the commencement of separate proceedings. The President of the District Court of Sofia considered that, for the purposes of the EAPO Regulation, it was not necessary to initiate secondary

proceedings. On the president's view, the payment order, albeit unenforceable, constituted an authentic instrument in the sense of the EAPO Regulation. The District Court of Sofia considered that the payment order had to be enforceable to be considered an authentic instrument.

As a result of these opposing views the District Court of Sofia decided to refer the following questions to the CJEU:

- *Is a payment order for a monetary claim under Article 410 of the *Grazhdanski protsesualen kodeks* (Bulgarian Civil Procedure Code; GPK) which has not yet acquired the force of *res judicata* an authentic instrument within the meaning of Article 4(10) of Regulation (EU) No 655/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014?*
- *If a payment order under Article 410 GPK is not an authentic instrument, must separate proceedings in accordance with Article 5(a) of Regulation (EU) No 655/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 be initiated by application outside the proceedings under Article 410 GPK?*
- *If a payment order under Article 410 GPK is an authentic instrument, must the court issue its decision within the period laid down in Article 18(1) of Regulation (EU) No 655/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 if a provision of national law states that periods are suspended during judicial vacations?*

### **The enforceability of the payment order**

The answer to the first question constituted the core of the judgment's reasoning. The Court examined if the "enforceability" was a precondition for the payment order to be considered an authentic instrument. As the Court rightly pointed out, the EAPO Regulation does not clearly state if the acts in question (judgments, court settlements, and authentic instruments) have to be enforceable (para. 39). In order to answer this question, the CJEU followed the reasoning of AG Szpunar in his Opinion which is based on a teleological, systemic and historical interpretation of the EAPO Regulation (para. 41). In its teleological analysis, the Court stated that a broad understanding of the concept of title could undermine the balance between the claimants' and the defendants' interests (para. 40). Creditors with a title do not have to prove, for instance, the likelihood of success

on the substance of the claim (*fumus boni iuris*). Consequently, including creditors with a non-enforceable title in the more lenient regime would allow a larger number of creditors to more “easily” access an EAPO; ultimately favouring the claimant’s position (para. 40). Concerning the systemic analysis, the CJEU referred to Article 14(1) of the EAPO Regulation. This provision is the only one in the EAPO Regulation which acknowledges certain rights to creditors with a non-enforceable title. In the Court’s view, this was just an exception. For the rest of the cases, in which there is no such distinction between creditors with and without enforceable titles, only the former would be considered to fit the concept of title. Lastly, the historical analysis was based on the Commission Proposal of the EAPO Regulation. Unlike in the final text of the regulation, the proposal made a clear and explicit differentiation between the regimes applicable to creditors with an enforceable title, and those without one. Creditors without an enforceable title were subject to further prerequisites (e.g. satisfaction of the *fumus boni iuris*). A reading of the final text in the light of these *travaux préparatoires* might suggest, on the Court’s view, that the current differentiation between creditors is also based on the enforceability of title. On this basis, the CJEU concluded that the title necessarily had to be enforceable, in order for an act to be considered an authentic instrument.

### **Autonomous definition of “substance of the claim”**

In the second question, the Bulgarian court asked if, in the event that the payment order were not an authentic instrument, it would be necessary to initiate separate proceedings on the substance of the claim. Preservation orders can be requested before, during, or after proceedings on the substance of the claim. Those creditors who request a preservation order *ante demandam* have a deadline of “30 days of the date on which [they] lodged the application or within 14 days of the date of the issue of the Order, whichever date is the later” (Article 10(1)) in which to initiate proceedings on the substance of the matter. It is not clear what should be understood by “proceedings on the substance of the claim”. Recital 13 of the EAPO Regulation, though not a binding provision, states that this term covers “any proceedings aimed at obtaining an enforceable title”. In the present case, the creditor obtained a payment order. Nevertheless, such order did not become enforceable because it could not be personally notified to the debtor. The only option left to the creditor was to initiate separate proceedings to pursue the claim. In the event that the creditor did not initiate the proceedings, the

payment order would be set aside by the court. In the present case, it was not clear whether the first proceedings by which the creditor obtained a payment order, or the secondary proceedings necessary to maintain the payment order were the proceedings on the substance of the matter. The CJEU relied on the “flexible” interpretation contained in Recital 13. The Court considered the “initial” proceedings in which the creditor obtained a payment order to be proceedings on the substance of the claim. Therefore, for the purposes of the EAPO Regulation, it was not necessary to initiate secondary proceedings.

### **Time limit to render the decision on the EAPO application**

Finally, the CJEU addressed whether a judicial vacation could be considered an “exceptional circumstance” (Article 45), justifying the delivery of the decision on the application of the EAPO outside the due time limit. The first issue concerned the way the question was formulated by the Bulgarian court. The court asks, in the event that the payment order be considered an authentic instrument, whether the time limit of Article 18(1) should be respected. If the payment order is an authentic instrument, the applicable time limit is the one under Article 18(2). This time limit is shorter (five days against the ten days of Article 18(1)), because the court that examines the EAPO applications does not have to evaluate the existence of the *fumus boni iuris* (Article 7(2)). Therefore, it is submitted that Article 18(2) should have been mentioned instead of Article 18(1) in the referring court’s question. Furthermore, taking into account the way in which the question was asked, it would only have had to be answered by the Court in the event that the payment order had been considered an authentic instrument (“If a payment order under (...) is an authentic instrument”). This was not the case, and thus the CJEU was not “obliged” to reply to the question. Despite this, the Court decided to answer. The CJEU considered that judicial vacations were not “exceptional circumstances” in the sense of Article 45. In the Court’s view, an interpretation to the contrary would have opposed the principle of celerity underpinning the EAPO Regulation (para. 55).

### **Conclusions**

From a general perspective, this judgment constitutes a good example of the balances that the CJEU has to make in order to maintain the status quo between the defendant and the claimant. On the one hand, ensuring that the EAPO achieves its ultimate objectives in terms of efficiency, on the other, assuring the proper



protection of the defendant. This search for an equilibrium between opposing interests also seems to be a general constant in other CJEU decisions concerning European uniform proceedings, especially those regarding the European Payment Order.

Observing the Court's reasoning in detail, we can clearly distinguish these two contrasting approaches. On the other hand, the Court adopts a pro-defendant approach regarding the first question, and a pro-claimant position on the one hand in its approach to the second and third questions.

In the first question, the Court adopted a pro-defendant approach. As the CJEU rightly remarks, the wording employed was unclear in asserting whether the title has to be enforceable or not. Anecdotally, only the Spanish version of the EAPO Regulation mentions that the authentic instrument has to be enforceable. As I already mentioned in my commentary on the AG Opinion in this case, this might be a mistranslation extracted from the Spanish version of Regulation 805/2004 establishing a European Enforcement Order Regulation. From the defendant's perspective, the EAPO Regulation is relatively aggressive. Since the preservation order is granted *ex parte*, defendants can only react once it is already effective. This puts a lot of pressure on the defendants, especially if they are a business requiring liquidity that might prefer to pay than to apply for a remedy and await to the proceedings on the substance of the case. It is for that reason that it was necessary to establish certain "barriers" to impede potential abuses: the preliminary prerequisites (Article 7). In those cases in which the creditor has already an enforceable title, the EAPO is merely the prelude to an incipient enforcement. However, if there is not such a title, or if the title is not yet enforceable, in that it is for instance a payment order, then the issuance of a preservation order must be the object of further prerequisites, since it is not clear if the right that the creditor claims exists. It is for that reason that the *prima facie* examination of the application includes an evaluation of the likelihood of success on the substance of the claim, and the provision of a security, which might deter abusive claimants from applying for an EAPO. Opening the most lenient regime to those creditors with a non-enforceable title would tip the balance in favour of the creditors. We might think about how the decision affects creditors who have obtained a title (e.g. judicial decisions) that is not yet enforceable. The existence of a title would serve as evidence of the likelihood of success on the substance of the claim. Regarding the security, judges could

except creditors without a title from providing the security “attending to the circumstances of the case” (Article 12(2)). Having a non-enforceable title might be also one of those circumstances. Only, judges might require a later deadline to deliver the decision on the preservation order (Article 10(1)). Therefore, materially, the impact of the decision might not harm the status of creditors with unenforceable titles as much.

For the two remaining (and more technical) questions, the Court stands on the creditors’ side. In the second question, the CJEU followed the guidance offered by the Preamble. In this particular case, Recital 13 entails a broad interpretation of “substance of the claim”, encompassing summary proceedings. Despite the fact that the recitals of the Preamble are not binding, the Court relied on them. Behind this decision, we might find the CJEU’s acknowledgement of the popularity of such proceedings at the domestic level, especially in debt recovery claims, including in regards to the European Payment Order. A decision to the contrary might have discouraged creditors from using the EAPO Regulation. Concerning the third question, the restrictive understanding of “exceptional circumstances” is not surprising. The CJEU usually tends to adopt a restrictive approach to any “exceptions” foreseen in European legislative provisions, which avoids giving domestic judges leeway to abuse them, which would ultimately undermine the objectives of the Regulation.

There are still many *non dices* aspects for which the CJEU might have something to say. Recent domestic case law on the EAPO Regulation is good proof of that. Nonetheless, domestic courts often prefer to find out themselves the solutions for such inquiries, adopting their own interpretive solutions, largely mirroring their national procedural traditions. Hopefully, in the coming future, a court might instead opt for a preliminary reference.

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# Ensuring quality of ODR platforms: a new (voluntary) certification scheme in France

*By Alexandre Biard, Erasmus University Rotterdam (ERC project - Building EU Civil Justice)*

In a previous post published in November 2018, we presented policy discussions that were (at that time) going on in France, and aimed at introducing a new regulatory framework for ODR platforms. As also explained in an article published in September 2019 (in French), ODR tends to become a new market in France with a multiplication of players offering services of diverging qualities. Today this market is in need of regulation to ensure the quality of the services provided, and to foster trust among its users.

The Act in question was finally passed on 23 March 2019. Rules on ODR certification were recently detailed in a decree published on 27 October 2019. They establish a new voluntary certification scheme for ODR platforms (after discussions, the scheme was kept non-compulsory). ODR platforms wishing to obtain certification must bring evidence that (among other things) they comply with data protection rules and confidentiality, that they operate in an independent and impartial manner, or that the procedures they used are fair and efficient. ODR platforms will be certified by one of the COFRAC-accredited bodies (*Comité français d'accréditation*). In practice, this means that contrary to what currently exists for the certification of consumer ADR bodies in France for which a single authority is competent (Commission d'Evaluation et de Contrôle de la Médiation de la Consommation) several certification bodies will operate in parallel for ODR platforms (however a certification request can only be directed at one certification body, and not to multiple). Together, certification bodies will be in charge of certifying ODR platforms and will supervise their activities on an on-going basis. Certification is given for three years (renewable). Certified platforms are allowed to display a logo on their websites (practicalities still need to be further detailed by the Ministry of Justice).

Accredited bodies will have to submit annual reports to the Ministry of Justice in

which they will have to specify the number of certifications granted (or withdrew), their surveillance activities, and the systemic problems they faced or identified. The updated list of ODR platforms complying with the certification criteria will be available on the website [www.justice.fr](http://www.justice.fr).

The future will tell whether ODR platforms are incentivized to seek certification (as it is expected today) or whether they will prefer to keep their regulatory freedom instead. More generally, one will see whether this step can indeed foster trust and ensure high-quality services within the emerging ODR market.

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## **Mutual Trust v Public Policy : 1-0**

**In a case concerning the declaration of enforceability of a UK costs order, the Supreme Court of the Hellenic Republic decided that the ‘excessive’ nature of the sum (compared to the subject matter of the dispute) does not run contrary to public policy. This judgment signals a clear-cut shift from the previous course followed both by the Supreme and instance courts. The decisive factor was the principle of mutual trust within the EU. The calibre of the judgment raises the question, whether courts will follow suit in cases falling outside the ambit of EU law.**

**[Areios Pagos, Nr. 579/2019, unreported]**

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### **THE FACTS**

The claimant is a Greek entrepreneur in the field of mutual funds and investment portfolio management. His company is registered at the London Stock Exchange. The defendant is a well known Greek journalist. On December 9, 2012, a report bearing her name was published in the digital version of an Athens newspaper, containing defamatory statements against the claimant. The claimant sued for damages before the High Court of Justice, Queens Bench Division. Although properly served, the respondent did not appear in the proceedings. The court

allowed the claim and assigned a judge with the issuance of an order, specifying the sum of the damages and costs. The judge ordered the default party to pay the amount of 40.000 ? for damages, and 76.290,86 ? for costs awarded on indemnity basis. The defendant did not appeal.

The UK order was declared enforceable in Greece [Athens CFI 1204/2015, unreported]. The judgment debtor appealed successfully: The Athens CoA ruled that the amount to be paid falls under the category of 'excessive' costs orders, which are disproportionate to the subject matter value in accordance with domestic perceptions and legal provisions. Therefore, the enforcement of the UK order would be unbearable for public policy reasons [Athens CoA 1228/2017, unreported]. The judgment creditor lodged an appeal on points of law before the Supreme Court.

## **THE RULING**

The Supreme Court was called to examine whether the Athens CoA interpreted properly the pertinent provisions of the Brussels I Regulation (which was the applicable regime in the case at hand), i.e. Article 45 in conjunction with Art. 34 point 1. The SC began its analysis by an extensive reference to judgments of the CJEU, combined with recital 16 of the Brussels I Regulation, which encapsulates the Mutual Trust principle. In particular, it mentioned the judgments in the following cases: C-7/98, Krombach, Recital 36; C-38/98, Renault, Recital 29; C-302/13, flyLAL-Lithuanian Airs, Recital 45-49; C-420/07, Orams, Recital 55), and C-681/13, Diageo, Recital 44. It then embarked on a scrutiny of the public policy clause, in which the following aspects were highlighted:

- The spirit of public policy should not be guided by domestic views; the values of European Civil Procedure, i.e. predominantly the European integration, have to be taken into consideration, even if this would mean downsizing domestic interests and values. Hence, the court of the second state may not deny recognition and enforcement on the grounds of perceptions which run contrary to the European perspective.
- The gravity of the impact in the domestic legal order should be of such a degree, which would lead to a retreat from the basic principle of mutual recognition.
- Serious financial repercussions invoked by the defendant may not give rise to sustain the public policy defense.

- In principle, a foreign costs order is recognized as long as it does not function as a camouflaged award of punitive damages. In this context, the second court may not examine whether the foreign costs order is 'excessive' or not. The latter is leading to a review to its substance.
- The proportionality principle should be interpreted in a twofold fashion: It is true that high costs may hinder effective access to Justice according to Article 6.1 ECHR and Article 20 of the Greek Constitution. However, on an equal footing, the non-compensation of the costs paid by the claimant in the foreign proceedings leads to exactly the same consequence.
- In conclusion, the proper interpretation of Article 34 point 1 of the Brussels I Regulation should lead to a disengagement of domestic perceptions on costs from the public policy clause. Put differently, the Greek provisions on costs do not form part of the core values of the domestic legislator.

In light of the above remarks, the SC reversed the appellate ruling. The fact that the proportionate costs under the Greek Statutes of Lawyer's fees would lead to a totally different and significantly lower amount (2.400 in stead of 76.290,86 ?) is not relevant or decisive in the case at hand. The proper issue to be examined is whether the costs ordered were necessary for the proper conduct and participation in the proceedings, and also whether the calculation of costs had taken place in accordance with the law and the evidence produced. Applying the proportionality principle in the way exercised by the Athens CoA amounts to a re-examination on the merits, which is totally unacceptable in the field of application of the Brussels I Regulation.

## **COMMENTS**

As mentioned in the introduction, the ruling of the SC departs from the line followed so far, which led to a series of judgments denying recognition and enforcement of foreign (mostly UK) orders and arbitral awards [in detail see [my commentary](#) published earlier in our blog, and my article: Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Greece under the Brussels I-bis Regulation, in Yearbook of Private International Law, Volume 16 (2014/2015), pp. 349 et seq]. The decision will be surely hailed by UK academics and practitioners, because it grants green light to the enforcement of judgments and orders issued in this jurisdiction.

The ruling applies however exclusively within the ambit of the Brussels I Regulation. It remains to be seen whether Greek courts will follow the same course in cases not falling under the Regulation's scope, e.g. arbitral awards, third country judgments, or even UK judgments and orders, whenever Brexit becomes reality.

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# **Gender and Private International Law (GaP) Transdisciplinary Research Project: Report on the kick-off event, October 25th at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law**

As announced earlier on this blog, the Gender and Private International Law (GaP) kick-off event took place on October 25th at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law in Hamburg.

This event, organized by Ivana Isailovic and Ralf Michaels, was a stimulating occasion for scholars from both Gender studies and Private and Public international law to meet and share approaches and views.

During a first session, Ivana Isailovic presented the field of Gender studies and its various theories such as liberal feminism and radical feminism. Each of these theories challenges the structures and representations of men and women in law, and helps us view differently norms and decisions. For example, whereas liberal feminism has always pushed for the law to reform itself in order to achieve formal equality, and therefore focused on rights allocation and on the concepts of

equality and autonomy, radical feminism insists on the idea of a legal system deeply shaped by men-dominated power structures, making it impossible for women to gain autonomy by using those legal tools.

Ivana Isailovic insisted on the fact that, as a field, Gender studies has expanded in different directions. As a result, it is extremely diverse and self-critical. Recent transnational feminism studies establish links between gender, colonialism and global capitalism. They are critical toward earliest feminist theories and their hegemonic feminist solidarity perception based on Western liberal paradigms.

After presenting those theories, Ivana Isailovic asked the participants to think about the way gender appears in their field and in their legal work, and challenged them to imagine how using this new Gender studies approach could impact their field of research, and maybe lead to different solutions, or different rules. That was quite challenging, especially for private lawyers who became aware, perhaps for the first time, of the influence of gender on their field.

After this first immersion in the world of gender studies, Roxana Banu offered a brief outline of private international law's methodology, in order to raise several questions regarding the promises and limits of an interdisciplinary conversation between Private International Law (PIL) and gender studies. Can PIL's techniques serve as entry points for bringing various insights of gender studies into the analysis of transnational legal matters? Alternatively, could the insights of gender studies fundamentally reform private international law's methodology?

After a short break, a brainstorming session on what PIL and Gender studies could bring to each other took place. Taking surrogacy as an example, participants were asked to view through a gender studies lens the issues raised by transnational surrogacy. This showed that the current conversation leaves aside some aspects which, conversely, a Gender studies approach puts at the fore, notably the autonomy of the surrogate mother and the fact that, under certain conditions, surrogacy could be a rational economic choice.

This first set of questions then prompted a broader philosophical debate about the contours of an interdisciplinary conversation between PIL and Gender studies. Aren't PIL scholars looking at PIL's methodology in its best light while ignoring the gap between its representation and its practice? Would this in turn enable or obfuscate the full potential of gender studies perspectives to critique and reform



private international law?

As noted by the organizers, “although private international law has always dealt with question related to gender justice, findings from gender studies have thus far received little attention within PIL”. The participants realized that is was also true the other way around: although they were studying international issues, scholars working on gender did not really paid much attention to PIL either.

One could ask why PIL has neglected gender studies for so long. The avowedly a-political self-perception of the discipline on the one hand, and the focus on public policy and human rights on the other, could explain why gender issues were not examined through a Gender studies lens. However, Gender studies could be a useful reading grid to help PIL become aware of the cultural understanding of gender in a global context. It could also help to understand how PIL’s techniques have historically responded to gender issues and explore ways to improve them. Issues like repudiation recognition, polygamous marriage or child abductions could benefit from this lens.

It was announced that a series of events will be organized: reading groups, a full day workshop and a conference planned for the Spring of 2020.

If you want to know more about the project, please contact [gender@mpipriv.de](mailto:gender@mpipriv.de).

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## **New Book: Recognition of Judgments in Contravention of Prorogation Agreements**

*Written by Felix M. Wilke, Senior Lecturer at the University of Bayreuth, Germany.*

Must a foreign judgment be recognised in which a jurisdiction agreement has been applied incorrectly, i.e. in which a court wrongly assumed to be competent or wrongly declined jurisdiction? Within the European Union, the basic answer is a rather straightforward “yes”. Recognition can only be refused on the grounds set forth in Article 45(1) Brussels *Ibis* Regulation, and unlike Article 7(1)(d) of the recently adopted HCCH Judgments Convention, none of them covers this scenario. What is more, Article 45(3) Brussels *Ibis* expressly states that the jurisdiction of the court of origin, save for certain instances of protected parties, may not be reviewed, not even under the guise of public policy.

Why, then, should one bother to read the book by Niklas Brüggemann, *Die Anerkennung prorogationswidriger Urteile im Europäischen und US-amerikanischen Zivilprozessrecht* (Mohr Siebeck) on the recognition of judgments in contravention of prorogation clauses in European and US-American law? The first and rather obvious reason can be found in the second part of the title. The book contains a concise, yet nuanced overview of the law of jurisdiction agreements in the US (in German). To the knowledge of this author, it has been 12 years since the last comparable work was published (Florian Eichel, *AGB-Gerichtsstandsklauseln im deutsch-amerikanischen Handelsverkehr* (Jenaer Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft) – which dealt with recognition only in passing and was limited to German and US law). Thus, this new book can be recommended to anyone with sufficient command of the German language who is interested in this particular aspect of US civil procedure, whose concepts – if one even dares to use that term – partly differs from European ideas.

The second and main reason to concern oneself with Brüggemann’s book, however, is his proposition for a new ground of refusal of recognition: a new Article 45(1)(e)(iii) Brussels *Ibis* for which he even offers a draft. To this end, the author comprehensively analyses jurisdiction agreements within the Brussels *Ibis* framework. While Article 31(2) Brussels *Ibis*, one of the main innovations of the Recast, has indeed “enhance[d] the effectiveness of exclusive choice-of-court agreements” (Recital 22 Brussels *Ibis*), Brüggemann argues that the Regulation still safeguards jurisdiction agreements insufficiently. He points out several situations (e.g. asymmetrical agreements, mere derogation agreements) that Article 31(2) Brussels *Ibis* does not cover in the first place. He also argues in some detail that the court first seised is allowed to examine the jurisdiction agreement in question with regard to the existence of an agreement and its

formal validity; its assessment would be binding upon other courts in line with *Gothaer Allgemeine* (ECJ Case C-456/11). This in turn would lead to a race to the courts and even to a race between the courts. (The latter metaphor is only partially convincing, for it is unlikely that the judges will intentionally accelerate their respective proceedings in order to “beat” the other court.)

Brüggemann goes on to argue that when it comes to jurisdiction agreements it is contradictory to make an exception to the principle of mutual trust in the *lis pendens* context but to strictly adhere to it in the recognition context. He demonstrates that, in particular, default judgments by a derogated court pose a significant risk for the defendant – one with which US civil procedure arguably deals more effectively. Alas, this appears to be the only instance in which the author’s comparative analysis, as interesting it is in and of itself, contributes to his broader point. He concludes by pointing out parallels to jurisdiction in insurance/consumer/employment matters (safeguarded at the stage of recognition by Article 45(1)(e)(i) Brussels Ibis) and exclusive jurisdiction (safeguarded at the stage of recognition by Article 45(1)(e)(ii) Brussels Ibis), and by suggesting that a special ground for refusal of recognition would have positive effects on the internal market.

While the abovementioned Judgments Convention is too recent to feature in the book, the author was able to consider its draft in a separate, albeit somewhat oddly positioned, chapter. Conspicuously absent is any specific discussion of the issue of damages for the violation of a choice of court agreement (see this recent post). The omission is certainly justifiable as Brüggemann is only concerned with procedural safeguards for jurisdiction agreements. But maybe such a remedy under substantive law could obviate or at least lessen the need for a separate ground of refusal of recognition? All in all, however, the author has carefully built a compelling case for an addition to Article 45(1) Brussels Ibis.

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# Staying Proceedings under the Civil Code of Quebec

*Written by Professor Stephen G.A. Pitel, Western University*

The decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in *R.S. v P.R.*, 2019 SCC 49 (available [here](#)) could be of interest to those who work with codified provisions on staying proceedings. It involves interpreting the language of several such provisions in the Civil Code of Quebec. Art. 3135 is the general provision for a stay of proceedings, but on its wording and as interpreted by the courts it is “exceptional” and so the hurdle for a stay is high. In contrast, Art. 3137 is a specific provision for a stay of proceedings based on *lis pendens* (proceedings underway elsewhere) and if it applies it does not have the same exceptional nature. This decision concerns Art. 3137 and how it should be interpreted.

P.R. (the husband) filed for divorce in Belgium. R.S. (the wife) filed for divorce three days later in Quebec. The husband sought to stay the Quebec proceedings on the basis of *lis pendens*. [para. 2] The motions judge refused a stay but the Quebec Court of Appeal reversed and granted a stay. The Supreme Court of Canada (6-1) reversed and restored the original refusal of a stay. The upshot is that the wife is allowed to proceed with divorce proceedings in Quebec.

The dispute was protracted largely because the husband, under Belgian law, purported to revoke all gifts he had given to the wife during their marriage. [paras. 2 and 13] These were worth more than \$33 million. This is legal under Belgian law though not free from controversy [para. 59].

Art. 3137 provides “On the application of a party, a Québec authority may stay its ruling on an action brought before it if another action, between the same parties, based on the same facts and having the same subject is pending before a foreign authority, provided that the latter action can result in a decision which may be recognized in Québec, or if such a decision has already been rendered by a foreign authority.”

One of the central issues for the court was whether a Belgian decision could be recognized in Quebec. Because a Belgian court would give effect to the revocation of the gifts in its decision, Justice Abella did not think so. She held that “foreign

judgments which annihilate not only countless international instruments regarding the equality of spouses and the protection of a vulnerable one, but also the very philosophical underpinnings of the provisions in the [Civil Code of Quebec] contradict those conceptions and will not be recognized in Quebec.” [para 142] In her view no Belgian decision accepting the revocation of the gifts on these facts could be recognized in Quebec: refusal under Art. 3155(5) - “the outcome of a foreign decision is manifestly inconsistent with public order as understood in international relations” - was inevitable. On this view, Art. 3137 did not apply and so there was no basis for a stay.

In contrast, Justice Gascon, joined by four other judges, held that a Belgian decision could be recognized in Quebec. The threshold is low, requiring only the possibility or plausibility of recognition. [para. 48] The focus is not on the specific provisions of any rule that the foreign court might apply in reaching its decision but on the outcome or decision itself. [para. 56] He held that “the husband was required to show only that there was a possibility that the eventual Belgian decision would not be manifestly inconsistent with public order as understood in international relations.” [para. 57] He listed several possible outcomes by which the Belgian court might render a decision that could be recognized in Quebec, including the prospect that a Belgian court might not give effect to the revocation of the gifts on the basis that the law so allowing is unconstitutional. [paras. 58-63]

On Justice Gascon’s reasoning, Art. 3137 did apply, making a stay available. However, the provision is discretionary, expressly using the word “may”. [para. 67] Justice Gascon considered that the motions judge’s decision to not grant a stay based on this discretion was not unreasonable and so should not have been disturbed by the Court of Appeal. [para. 80]

Unlike the other six judges, Justice Brown thought that a stay should be granted. In his dissent, he expressed concern about the motions judge’s reasoning. He held that the motions judge had, in interpreting the conditions that trigger Art. 3137, made “overriding” errors that justified appellate intervention. [para. 162] He also held that the motions judge had not truly exercised the discretion under Art. 3137. [para. 169] Accordingly he was prepared to exercise it afresh and held (agreeing with the Quebec Court of Appeal) that the Quebec proceedings should be stayed. The factors favoured proceedings in Belgium, especially the concern that any Quebec judgment would not be recognized in Belgium because the Belgian proceedings had started first. [para. 186]

It appears that one of the key reasons for the split between Justice Gascon and Justice Brown is that the former focused on the substantial assets in Quebec, which would of course be subject to a Quebec divorce decision [para. 91], whereas the latter focused on the substantial assets in Belgium that would be unaffected by a Quebec divorce decision [para. 187]. This goes to the exercise of the discretion to ignore the *lis pendens* and refuse a stay. One of the relevant factors for this is whether the court's eventual judgment would be recognized by the forum first seized. It is easy to appreciate that this factor does not matter if that judgment does not need to be recognized there at all to be effective and, in contrast, that it is vital if it must be. [para. 90] The facts position this case somewhere in between the ends of this spectrum.

The split between Justice Gascon and Justice Abella in part is based on their understanding of Belgian law. Justice Abella repeatedly noted that there is no evidence – Belgian law being a matter of fact in a Canadian court – that a Belgian court would do anything other than give effect to the revocation. [paras. 117-21] In contrast, Justice Gascon held there was at least some evidence going the other way [para. 59] and in addition he was prepared to rely on the possibility that certain arguments might be successfully advanced. [paras. 61-62]

Many of the issues in this case arise specifically because of the separate treatment under Quebec law of *lis pendens*. The analysis at common law could have been quite different, all conducted under the rubric of the doctrine of *forum non conveniens*. Parallel proceedings would have been one of the factors considered in the analysis. But the common law has been prepared to reject according much if any weight to first-in-time proceedings based only on relatively short differences in timing (in this case, three days). Indeed, Justice Gascon noted the tension caused by strict application of first-in-time rules, either when staying proceedings or deciding whether to recognize a foreign judgment. [para. 89]

One small point might be worth a final comment. In developing the proper interpretation of Art. 3137 the judges stressed that if successfully invoked by the defendant it leads to a stay of proceedings, which is less final and so less prejudicial to the plaintiff than an outright dismissal of the proceeding. A proceeding so stayed could, if justice demanded, be reactivated. This is contrasted with the general provision in Art. 3135. [paras. 72-73 and 179] However, that provision, while not using the word “stay”, uses the phrase “decline jurisdiction”. The judges treated it as a given that this means the

proceedings are dismissed and at an end. But is it not at least arguable that to decline jurisdiction the court must first have jurisdiction, and that the declining amounts to a stay of that jurisdiction and not a dismissal? The court could have explained the basis for its position on this issue somewhat more fulsomely.

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# **HCCH Event on the HCCH Service Convention in the Era of Electronic and Information Technology and a few thoughts**

*Written by Mayela Celis*

The Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) is organising an event entitled *HCCH a / Bridged: Innovation in Cross-Border Litigation and Civil Procedure*, which will be held on 11 December 2019 in The Hague, the Netherlands. This year's edition will be on the HCCH Service Convention.

The agenda and the registration form are available [here](#). The deadline for registrations is Monday 11 November 2019. The HCCH news item is available [here](#).

A bit of background with regard to the HCCH Service Convention and IT: As you may be aware, the Permanent Bureau published in 2016 a *Practical Handbook on the Operation of the Service Convention* (available for purchase [here](#)), which contains a detailed Annex on the developments on electronic service of documents (and not only with regard to the Service Convention). In that Annex, developments on the service of documents by e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, etc. and its interrelationship with the Service Convention were analysed. Not surprisingly, cases where electronic service of process was used were rare under the Service Convention (usually, the physical address of the defendant is not known, thus the

Service Convention does not apply and the courts resort to substituted service).

A more important issue, though, appears to be the electronic transmission of requests under the Service Convention. According to a recent conclusion of the HCCH governance council, it was mandated that:

*Electronic transmission of requests*

“40. Council mandated the Permanent Bureau to conduct work with respect to the development of an electronic system to support and improve the operation of both the Service and Evidence Conventions. The Permanent Bureau was requested to provide an update at Council’s 2020 meeting. The update should address the following issues: whether and how information technology would support and improve the operation of the Conventions; current practices on the electronic transmission of requests under the Conventions; legal and technological barriers to such transmission and how best to address these; and how a possible international system for electronic transmission would be financed. “

In contrast, the European Union seems to be at the forefront in encouraging electronic service of documents as such, see for example the new proposal for Regulation on the service of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil or commercial matters, [click here](#) (EU Parliament, first reading).

Article 15a reads as follows:

“Electronic service

1. Service of judicial documents may be effected directly on persons domiciled in another Member State through electronic means to electronic addresses accessible to the addressee, provided that **both** of the following conditions are fulfilled: [Am. 45]

(a) the documents are sent and received using qualified electronic registered delivery services within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and [Am. 46]

(b) after the commencement of legal proceedings, the addressee gave express consent to the court or authority seized with the proceedings to use that particular electronic address for purposes of serving documents in course of the legal proceedings. [Am. 47].”



By adding the word “both” the European Parliament seems to restrict electronic service to documents **after** service of process has been made (see previous European Commission’s proposal). This, in my view, is correct and gives the necessary protection to the defendant. In the future and with new IT developments, this might change and IT might be more widely used by all citizens (think of a government account for each citizen for the purpose of receiving government services and service of process -although service of process comes as a result of private litigation so this might be sensitive-), and thus this might provide more safeguards. In my view, the key issue in electronic service is to obtain the consent of the defendant (except for cases of substituted service).

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## Reform of Singapore’s Foreign Judgment Rules

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October, the amendments to the Reciprocal Enforcement of Foreign Judgments Act (“REFJA”) came into force. REFJA is based on the UK Foreign Judgments (Reciprocal Enforcement) Act 1933, but in this recent round of amendments has deviated in some significant ways from the 1933 Act. The limitation to judgments from “superior courts” has been removed. Foreign interlocutory orders such as freezing orders and foreign non-money judgments now fall within the scope of REFJA. So too do judicial settlements, which are defined in identical terms to the definition contained in the Choice of Court Agreements Act 2016 (which enacted the Hague Convention on Choice of Court Agreements into Singapore law).

In relation to non-money judgments, such judgments may only be enforced if the Singapore court is satisfied that enforcement of the judgment would be “just and convenient”. According to the Parliamentary Debates, it may not be “just and convenient” to allow registration of a non-money judgment under the amended REFJA if to do so would give rise to practical difficulties or issues of policy and

convenience. The Act gives the court the discretion to make an order for the registration of the monetary equivalent of the relief if this is the case.

An interlocutory judgment need not be “final and conclusive” for the purposes of registration under REFJA. The intention underlying this expansion is to allow Singapore courts to enforce foreign interlocutory orders such as asset freezing orders. This plugs a hole as currently *Mareva* injunctions are not regarded as free-standing relief under Singapore law. It has recently been held by the Court of Appeal that the Singapore court would only grant *Mareva* injunctions in aid of foreign proceedings if: (i) the Singapore court has personal jurisdiction over the defendant and (ii) the plaintiff has a reasonable accrued cause of action against the defendant in Singapore (*Bi Xiaoqing v China Medical Technologies Inc* [2019] SGCA 50).

New grounds of refusal of registration or to set aside registration have been added: if the judgment has been discharged (eg, in the event of bankruptcy of the judgment debtor), the damages are non-compensatory in nature, and if the notice of the registration had not been served on the judgment debtor, or the notice of registration was defective.

It is made clear that the court of origin would not be deemed to have had jurisdiction in an action *in personam* if the defendant voluntarily appeared in the proceedings solely to invite the court in its discretion not to exercise its jurisdiction in the proceedings. *Henry v Geoprosco* [1976] QB 726 would thus not apply for the purposes of REFJA although its continued applicability at common law is ambiguous (see *WSG Nimbus Pte Ltd v Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka* [2002] 1 SLR(R) 1088).

All along, only judgments from the superior courts of Hong Kong SAR have been registrable under REFJA. The intention now is to repeal the Reciprocal Enforcement of Commonwealth Judgments Act (“RECJA”; based on the UK Administration of Justice Act 1920) and to transfer the countries which are gazetted under RECJA to the amended REFJA. The Bill to repeal RECJA has been passed by Parliament.

The amended REFJA may be found here: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/REFJA1959>