

European Private International Law

2015/2017

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Ars Aequi Libri
Nijmegen 2015

ISBN 978-90-6916-599-8
NUR 822

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Coverdesign: Janine van Winden.

Preface

Private International Law is private law and thereby its rules primarily derive from national law. However, this description emanates from days of old. Since the Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999, it requires modification as far as the Member States of the European Union are concerned. In addition to multilateral Conventions in the field of Private International Law, European Regulations which address cross-border relationships have obtained a significant position. In the years to come, Private International Law within the European Union will, first and foremost, have its origins in European law. This is why this book is entitled European Private International Law. It collects international and European instruments which primarily contain Private International Law rules for jurisdiction, the applicable law and the recognition and enforcement of foreign decisions. The instruments were adopted by various organisations such as the Hague Conference on Private International Law, the United Nations, the International Commission on Civil Status, the Council of Europe, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Comité Maritime International and the European Union. Hence, Private International Law rules of national origin are not contained in this collection. This second edition contains an update of all instruments.

The compilation may well be useful for legal education and practice alike.

Utrecht, March 2015

Katharina Boele-Woelki

Roderic ter Rele

Some Guidance as to Private International Law

Private law relationships with foreign elements

Generally, private law relationships with foreign elements, such as the differing nationalities of the parties or their habitual residence/place of business in different countries, are subject to national substantive law. The ‘conflict’ as to which possible substantive law of the legal systems involved is to be applied must be decided by the respective rules of Private International Law determining the law which is applicable. These rules use a connecting factor such as the common nationality or the place of habitual residence of the person who, for example, is performing the most characteristic contractual obligation in order to ‘connect’ the private relationship with a specific set of legal rules under the relevant national law. The choice of the connecting factor is based on the consideration that, on the one hand, the factor must be relevant to the specific relationship and, on the other, that a national system is to be applied which is found to have, conceptually, the closest connection with that relationship. A ‘conflict’ between legal systems is to be decided in which several legal systems, or at least two, are involved of which the respective national laws could be applied.

Under specific circumstances national legal policy may require the application of rules of national law. This is the case when overriding mandatory rules are to be taken into account. In most cases, however, national legal policy will offer rules of national law to be applied and may not care, for instance, whether the nationals of the country concerned have obtained their divorce in another country where probably a different, and less restrictive, divorce law has been applied or whether a contract is governed by a law with which none of the parties has a connection and which has only been chosen as the most neutral law.

However, not all legal systems and the societies which they serve are prepared to accept everything. When the recognition of a specific status which has been obtained abroad (divorce, marriage, adoption), or the enforcement of a foreign judgment, is sought the legal system where this is to take place applies its recognition and enforcement rules. At this stage certain safety mechanisms come into play, the most important of which is the prevention of any violation of national public policy. This falls within the area of recognition and enforcement. It is generally characterised as international procedural law together with the rules on the international jurisdictional competence of courts and tribunals, whereas the issue of the applicable law is commonly indicated as the ‘conflict of law’. Hence the overall term ‘Private International Law’ can be applied to the rules which address jurisdiction, the applicable law and recognition and enforcement.

Different legal sources

Regarding the legal sources of Private International Law rules a distinction is to be made between three levels: the international level, the European level and the national level which consists of statutory rules and/or case law. The Private International Law rules adopted and enacted at these different levels are to be applied in accordance with a generally accepted hierarchy. If a country is bound by an international Convention it will not apply its national conflict of law rules unless the legal issue does not fall within the Convention’s scope of application. The same holds true for the relationship between European Regulations on the one side, and national rules, on the other, as far as the European Union is concerned. If the European Regulation applies – that is if the relevant legal question falls within its scope of application – national conflict of law rules cannot be consulted. The expectation that the hierarchy of precedence as between international Conventions and European Regulations might be similar in the sense that the higher level (international) takes priority over the lower level (regional) is, however, not justified. In this respect a ‘one size fits all’ answer cannot be provided since each spe-

cific European Regulation itself determines whether or not, in relation to the contracting states of an international Convention, preference is to be given to either European or (existing) Convention rules. In respect of the three different questions it depends on the nature of the cross-border relationship (e.g. contract, delict and tort or family relationship) which instrument is to be consulted by the competent forum. Only the legal sources which address the specific Private International Law issue are to be consulted. Obviously, the answer to the question whether a court has jurisdictional competence cannot be found in a Convention which contains only rules of applicable law. It is therefore essential to know exactly what question is posed and the kind of rules which the legal source (a Regulation or a Convention) contains. In particular, those who are not familiar with the methods and techniques of Private International Law often find it difficult to find their way through the jungle of Private International Law rules. The schematic overview below might be of assistance in this endeavour.

| | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Cross-border relationship | Which court decides? | Which law applies? | Can the foreign decision/ the status obtained abroad be recognised and enforced? |
| Legal sources | International procedural law | Conflict of laws | International procedural law |
| EU Regulations | | | |
| Conventions (in general subordinated to EU law) | | | |
| National statutes and case law | | | |

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Preface | V |
| Some Guidance as to Private International Law | VII |
| Contents | IX |

GENERAL ISSUES

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Vienna 23 May 1969, Articles 30-33 (<i>Vienna Treaty Convention</i>) | 1 |
| 2. Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Lisbon 13 December 2007, Articles 49, 54, 67, 81, 114, 267, 326-334 (<i>TFEU</i>) | 2 |
| 3. Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, New York 28 September 1954, Article 12 (<i>Stateless Persons Convention</i>) | 7 |
| 4. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Geneva 28 July 1951 Articles 1, 12 (<i>Refugees Convention</i>) | 8 |

FAMILY LAW AND SUCCESSION

Personal Status

| | |
|---|----|
| 5. Convention on the Establishment of Maternal Descents of Natural Children, Brussels 12 September 1962, Articles 5. (<i>ICCS Maternal Descent Convention</i>) | 11 |
| 6. Convention on Legitimation by Marriage, Rome 10 September 1970 (<i>ICCS Legitimation Convention</i>) | 12 |
| 7. Convention on the Recognition of Decisions Recording a Sex Reassignment, Vienna 12 September 2000 (<i>ICCS Sex Reassignment Convention</i>) | 14 |

Name

| | |
|--|----|
| 8. Convention on the Law Applicable to Surnames and Given Names, Munich 5 September 1980 (<i>ICCS Names Convention</i>) | 15 |
|--|----|

Marriage

| | |
|--|----|
| 9. Convention on Celebration and Recognition of the Validity of Marriages, The Hague 14 March 1978 (<i>Hague Marriage Convention</i>) | 16 |
|--|----|

Matrimonial Property Regime

| | |
|---|----|
| 10. Convention Relating to Conflicts of Laws with regard to the Effects of Marriage on the Rights and Duties of the Spouses in their Personal Relationship and with regard to their Estates, The Hague 17 July 1905 (<i>Hague Effects of Marriage Convention</i>) | 19 |
| 11. Convention on the Law Applicable to Matrimonial Property Regimes, The Hague 14 March 1978 (<i>Hague Matrimonial Property Regimes Convention</i>) | 20 |

Marriage Dissolution

| | |
|---|----|
| 12. Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 of 27 November 2003 Concerning Jurisdiction and the Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments in Matrimonial Matters and the Matters of Parental Responsibility, Repealing Regulation (EC) No 1347/2000 (<i>Brussels IIbis</i>) | 25 |
| 13. Council Regulation (EU) No 1259/2010 of 20 December 2010 Implementing Enhanced Cooperation in the Area of the Law Applicable to Divorce and Legal Separation (<i>Rome III</i>) | 43 |
| 14. Convention on the Recognition of Decisions Relating to the Matrimonial Bond, Luxembourg 8 September 1967 (<i>ICCS Recognition of Marriage Dissolution Convention</i>) | 49 |
| 15. Convention on the Recognition of Divorces and Legal Separations, The Hague 1 June 1970 (<i>Hague Divorce Convention</i>) | 52 |

Protection of Children and Adults

| | |
|---|----|
| 16. Regulation (EU) No 606/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 June 2013 on Mutual Recognition of Protection Measures in Civil Matters (<i>Protection Regulation</i>) | 56 |
| 17. Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 of 27 November 2003 Concerning Jurisdiction and the Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments in Matrimonial Matters and the Matters of Parental Responsibility, Repealing Regulation (EC) No 1347/2000 (<i>Brussels IIbis</i>) | 65 |
| 18. Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, The Hague 19 October 1996 (<i>Hague Protection of Children Convention</i>) | 65 |
| 19. Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, The Hague 25 October 1980 (<i>Hague Child Abduction Convention</i>) | 75 |
| 20. European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children, Luxembourg 20 May 1980 (<i>CE Custody of Children Convention</i>) | 82 |
| 21. Convention on the International Protection of Adults, The Hague 13 January 2000 (<i>Hague Protection of Adults Convention</i>) | 88 |

Adoption

| | |
|---|-----|
| 22. Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, The Hague 29 May 1993 (<i>Hague Adoption Convention</i>) | 96 |
| 23. European Convention on the Adoption of Children (Revised), Strasbourg 27 November 2008 (<i>CE Adoption Convention</i>) | 104 |

Maintenance Obligations

| | |
|--|-----|
| 24. Council Regulation (EC) No 4/2009 of 18 December 2008 on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions and Cooperation in Matters Relating to Maintenance Obligations (<i>Maintenance Obligations Regulation</i>) | 109 |
| 25. Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and other Forms of Family Maintenance, The Hague 23 November 2007 (<i>Hague Recovery of Family Maintenance Convention</i>) | 131 |
| 26. Protocol on the Law Applicable to Maintenance Obligations, The Hague 23 November 2007 (<i>Hague Maintenance Obligations Protocol</i>) | 148 |
| 27. Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Relating to Maintenance Obligations, The Hague 2 October 1973 (<i>Hague Maintenance Obligations Enforcement Convention</i>) | 152 |

Succession

| | |
|---|-----|
| 28. Regulation (EU) No 650/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2012 on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition and enforcement of decisions and acceptance and enforcement of authentic instruments in matters of succession and on the creation of a European Certificate of Succession (<i>Succession Regulation</i>) | 158 |
| 29. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1329/2014 of 9 December 2014 establishing the Forms referred to in Regulation (EU) No 650/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition and enforcement of decisions and acceptance and enforcement of authentic instruments in matters of succession and on the creation of a European Certificate of Succession (<i>Implementing Regulation Succession Regulation</i>) | 186 |
| 30. Convention on the Conflicts of Laws Relating to the Form of Testamentary Dispositions, The Hague 5 October 1961 (<i>Hague Form of Testaments Convention</i>) | 186 |
| 31. Convention on the Establishment of a Scheme of Registration of Wills, Basle 16 May 1972 (<i>CE Registration of Wills Convention</i>) | 189 |

LAW OF OBLIGATIONS

Contracts

| | |
|--|-----|
| 32. Regulation (EC) No 593/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 on the Law Applicable to Contractual Obligations (<i>Rome I</i>) | 191 |
| 33. Convention on the Law Applicable to Agency, The Hague 14 March 1978 (<i>Hague Agency Convention</i>) | 203 |
| 34. The Hague Principles on Choice of Law in International Commercial Contracts (<i>Hague Principles on Choice of Law</i>) | 207 |
| 35. United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods, Vienna 11 April 1980, Articles 1-13, 31, 57, 90-100 (<i>CISG</i>) | 209 |
| 36. Unidroit Principles of International Commercial Contracts 2010, Preamble (<i>UNIDROIT Principles</i>) | 212 |
| 37. Principles of European Contract Law 1998, Article 1.101 (<i>PECL</i>) | 216 |

Transport

| | |
|---|-----|
| 38. Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road, Geneva 19 May 1956, Articles 1, 2, 31, 39, 41 (<i>CMR</i>) | 216 |
| 39. Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules for International Carriage by Air, Montreal 28 May 1999, Articles 1, 29, 33, 45-46, 49 (<i>Montreal Convention</i>) | 218 |

Delict/Tort

| | |
|---|-----|
| 40. 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 (<i>Rome II</i>) | 220 |
| 41. Convention on the Law Applicable to Traffic Accidents, The Hague 4 May 1971 (<i>Hague Traffic Accidents Convention</i>) | 230 |
| 42. Convention on the Law Applicable to Products Liability, The Hague 2 October 1973 (<i>Hague Products Liability Convention</i>) | 233 |

Legal persons

| | |
|--|-----|
| 43. European Convention on the Recognition of the Legal Personality of International Non-Governmental Organisations, Strasbourg 24 April 1986 (<i>CE Recognition of NGOs Convention</i>) | 236 |
|--|-----|

Trust/Property

| | |
|---|-----|
| 44. Convention on the Law Applicable to Trust and on their Recognition, The Hague 1 July 1985 (<i>Hague Trust Convention</i>) | 238 |
| 45. Convention on the Law Applicable to Certain Rights in Respect of Securities held with an Intermediary, The Hague 5 July 2006 (<i>Hague Securities Convention</i>) | 242 |

PROCEDURAL LAW

Immunity

| | |
|--|-----|
| 46. European Convention on State Immunity, Basle 16 May 1972, Articles 1-23, 27, 29-33, 35, 39 and Annex (<i>CE Immunity Convention</i>) | 251 |
|--|-----|

Jurisdiction, Recognition and Enforcement

| | |
|--|-----|
| 47. Regulation (EU) No 1215/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2012 on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters (<i>Brussels I Recast</i>) | 257 |
|--|-----|

| | |
|--|-----|
| 48. Convention on Jurisdiction and the Recognition and Enforcement of Judgements in Civil and Commercial Matters, Lugano 30 October 2007 (<i>Lugano Convention</i>) | 278 |
| 49. Convention on Choice of Court Agreements, The Hague 30 June 2005 (<i>Hague Choice of Court Convention</i>) | 295 |
| 50. Regulation (EC) No 1896/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 creating a European Order for Payment Procedure (<i>Order for Payment Procedure Regulation</i>) | 303 |
| 51. Regulation (EC) No 861/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2007 establishing a European Small Claims Procedure (<i>Small Claims Procedure Regulation</i>) | 313 |
| 52. Regulation (EC) No 805/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 creating a European Enforcement Order for Uncontested Claims (<i>Enforcement Order for Uncontested Claims Regulation</i>) | 324 |

Access to Justice

| | |
|--|-----|
| 53. Regulation (EC) No 1393/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2007 on the Service in the Member States of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters (Service of Documents), and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1348/2000 (<i>Service of Documents Regulation</i>) | 333 |
| 54. Convention on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil and Commercial Matters, The Hague 15 November 1965 (<i>Hague Service of Documents Convention</i>) | 342 |
| 55. Council Regulation (EC) No 1206/2001 of 28 May 2001 on Cooperation between the Courts of the Member States in the Taking of Evidence in Civil or Commercial Matters (<i>Evidence Regulation</i>) | 347 |
| 56. Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters, The Hague 18 March 1970 (<i>Hague Evidence Convention</i>) | 354 |
| 57. Convention on International Access to Justice, The Hague 25 October 1980 (<i>Hague Access to Justice Convention</i>) | 360 |
| 58. Convention Relating to Civil Procedure, The Hague 1 March 1954 (<i>Hague Civil Procedure Convention</i>) | 366 |
| 59. European Convention on Information on Foreign Law, London 7 June 1968, Articles 1-16 (<i>CE Information Foreign Law Convention</i>) | 371 |

Legalisation

| | |
|--|-----|
| 60. Convention Abolishing the Requirement of Legalisation for Foreign Public Documents, The Hague 5 October 1961 (<i>Hague Legalisation Convention</i>) | 374 |
|--|-----|

Arrest

| | |
|--|-----|
| 61. Regulation (EU) No 655/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 establishing a European Account Preservation Order procedure to facilitate cross-border debt recovery in civil and commercial matters (<i>European Account Preservation Order Regulation</i>) | 377 |
| 62. International Convention Relating to the Arrest of Seagoing Ships, Brussels 10 May 1952 (<i>Arrest of Ships Convention</i>) | 402 |
| 63. Council Regulation (EC) No 1346/2000 of 29 May 2000 on Insolvency Proceedings (<i>Insolvency Regulation</i>) | 406 |
| 64. Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards, New York 10 June 1958 (<i>UN Arbitration Convention</i>) | 419 |
| 65. European Convention on International Commercial Arbitration, Geneva 21 April 1961 (<i>European Arbitration Convention</i>) | 423 |
| 66. Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States, Washington 18 March 1965 (<i>Investment Disputes Convention</i>) | 427 |