THE EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE
AND THE AUTONOMY OF THE MEMBER STATES
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The European Court of Justice and the Autonomy of the Member States
Hans-W. Micklitz and Bruno De Witte (eds.)

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The Lisbon Treaty has, once again, extended the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union to new areas of EU law. The field of criminal justice and police cooperation, covered by the former ‘third pillar’ of the European Union, will from now on be subject to the full review and interpretation powers of the Court of Justice. In the field of immigration law, lower national courts are now entitled to engage with the Court of Justice through the preliminary reference mechanism, and they have started to make active use of that new possibility. The EU Charter of Rights has now the same legal value as the Treaties themselves, thus opening up yet another field for active intervention by the Court of Justice. We find ourselves in front of a seeming paradox: whereas individual Member State governments occasionally complain about judgments of the Court of Justice, especially when those judgments curtail that state’s policy autonomy in a sensitive domain, the collectivity of the Member State governments have agreed, in each treaty revision so far, to confirm and extend the far-reaching powers which the Court of Justice possesses for enforcing EU law. The explanation of the paradox can only be that, deep down, the Member States of the EU remain convinced that an effective Court of Justice with strong enforcement powers is one of the salient features of European Community law which have stood the test of time, and feel no inclination to clip the wings of that Court for fear that this would affect the effectiveness of the European integration process. Nevertheless, the grumblings about single judgments, or about the consistency and direction of the Court in particular policy fields, have never ceased, and indeed have become more audible in recent years. One overall theme in this respect is the perception that the Court of Justice, quite often, does not leave sufficient autonomy to the Member States in developing their own legal and policy choices in areas where European and national competences overlap.

This overall theme was explored at a conference organised at the European University Institute in Florence in 2009, and was later elaborated in the chapters of this volume. The editors of the volume would like to express their gratitude to the generous sponsors of the conference, namely the Academy of European Law of the EUI, and the European Union Democracy Observatory programme, also based at the EUI. They are grateful for the friendly, patient and efficient cooperation of Intersentia publishers. This book owes a great debt to Hanna
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Hans Micklitz and Bruno De Witte
Florence/Maastricht, October 2011.
CONTENTS

Foreword ................................................................. v

PART I.
INTRODUCTION

Judge-Made Integration?
Hans-W. Micklitz and Hanna Schebesta ......................... 3

1. Introduction .......................................................... 3
2. Introducing the Authors’ Contributions ................................. 4

PART II.
THE GENERAL SHAPE OF MEMBER STATE AUTONOMY
IN THE COURT’S CASE LAW

Competence and Member State Autonomy: Causality, Consequence and
Legitimacy
Paul Craig .......................................................... 11

1. Competence: The ‘Allure of the Simple’ and the ‘Complexity of Reality’ . . 11
2. Competence and Member State Autonomy: Four Factors in Temporal
Perspective .......................................................... 12
  2.1. From Rome to the SEA ......................................... 12
  2.2. From the SEA to the Treaty on European Union .................. 16
  2.3. From Maastricht to Nice ........................................ 18
  2.4. Post Nice ...................................................... 21
  2.5. Conclusion ...................................................... 25
3. Member State Autonomy: Choice, Consequences and Legitimacy ....... 25
  3.1. The Logic of Collective Action .................................. 26
  3.2. Output Legitimacy: Peace and Prosperity ...................... 26
  3.3. Output Legitimacy: Externalities ................................ 27
  3.4. Output Legitimacy: ‘Tension’ and ‘Resolution’ ................. 28
  3.5. Output Legitimacy: Questioning the Premise ................... 29
  3.6. Output Legitimacy: the Balance between the Economic
      and the Social .................................................... 30
3.7. Input Legitimacy: the Rationales for the Shift ......................... 31
4. Conclusion ............................................................................. 34

The European Court of Justice’s Approach to Primacy and European Constitutionalism – Preserving the European Constitutional Order?
Fabian Amtenbrink ................................................................. 35

1. Introductory Remarks .......................................................... 35
2. European Constitutionalism .................................................. 38
   2.1. Terminology ...................................................................... 39
   2.2. The National and European (Constitutional) Legal Orders:
       Companions in Fate ...................................................... 42
3. The ECJ’s Principled Approach to Primacy: a Claim of Absolute Sovereignty in Disguise? ...................................................... 52
   3.1. On the ECJ’s Concept of Primacy ...................................... 53
   3.2. Recognizing Member State’s Common (Constitutional)
       Legal Traditions ......................................................... 56
   3.3. Recognition of National (Constitutional) Legal Standards ....... 60
4. Concluding Remarks ............................................................. 62

The Judge’s Role in European Integration – The Court of Justice and Its Critics
Jürgen Basedow .............................................................. 65

1. Challenges to the Legality of the European Court’s Practice ........... 65
2. Centrifugal Forces and the Functions of the Court ....................... 66
   2.1. The Legal Framework .................................................... 66
   2.2. Centrifugal Forces in the Member States ......................... 67
   2.3. Three Functions of the Court of Justice ............................ 69
3. The Review Function ............................................................ 70
   3.1. Infringement Proceedings against Member States ................. 70
   3.2. Legal Doctrines Furthering the Review Function ................. 71
4. The Impulse Function ................................................................ 72
   4.1. The Synchrony of Political and Legal Action ...................... 72
   4.2. Example 1: Admission of Foreign Students to Austrian Universities 73
   4.3. Example 2: Opening National Insurance Markets ................ 73
   4.4. Example 3: Free Movement for Companies ........................ 74
   4.5. Summary: Legal Contributions to the Community’s Mission .... 75
5. The Uniformity Function ......................................................... 76
   5.1. The Court Confronted with a Growing Body of Fragmentary
       Legislation ................................................................. 76
   5.2. Underperformance .......................................................... 76
   5.3. Overperformance ............................................................ 78
5.4. The Court’s Insecurity ........................................... 78
6. Conclusion .......................................................... 79

PART III.
INTERNAL MARKET, CITIZENSHIP AND MIGRATION

How Proportionate is the Proportionality Principle? Some critical remarks on the use and methodology of the proportionality principle in the internal market case law of the ECJ
Norbert REICH ....................................................... 83

1. From Admiration to Frustration? .............................. 83
2. Widening the Scope of Application of the Fundamental Freedoms
   Beyond Market Access – How Wide? ............................. 85
   2.1. Beyond Market Access ....................................... 86
   2.2. No “Reserved” or “Exempted” Areas ....................... 90
   2.3. A Broad and at the Same Time a Narrow Reading of “Public
        Interest” Justifications ........................................ 91
3. The Proportionality Principle as the “Super-Norm”? .......... 94
   3.1. Some Preliminary Methodological Reflections ............... 94
   3.2. The Origin in the Early Case Law of the ECJ ............... 95
   3.3. Possible Methodological Sophistication or Aberration? The
        Different and Sometimes Incoherent Tests of the ECJ ........ 97
        3.3.1. Examples for the “autonomous balancing” approach .. 98
        3.3.2. Examples for the “state margin of appreciation” approach .. 100
        3.3.3. Examples for the – rather ambivalent – “fundamental
               rights approach” ............................................. 103
        3.3.4. Examples for the “quasi-legislative approach” .......... 105
4. Where Are We Now – A Plea for Judicial Restraint .......... 108

Judicial Activism or Constitutional Interaction? Policymaking by the ECJ in the Field of Union Citizenship
Michael DOUGAN .................................................... 113

1. Introduction ........................................................ 113
2. Some Preliminary Remarks on “Judicial Activism” ............ 114
4. Developments in the Citizenship Case Law since 2008 .......... 131
5. A More Constructive Reading of the Citizenship Case Law? .... 139
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Reserved Areas” of the Member States and the ECJ: the Case of Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragana DAMJANOVIC</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Article 165 TFEU (ex Article 149 ECT): Education as a “Reserved Area” of the Member States and the Bologna Process</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. The ‘Implied Powers Doctrine’ as the Basis of EU Legal Integration within Higher Education</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Aim of This Paper</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Various Strands of ECJ Case Law in Higher Education</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Professional Recognition</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Student Mobility: Cross-Border Access to Higher Education Courses</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1. The issue of student mobility within the triangle of EU case law, EU hard law and European soft law (in particular, the Bologna process)</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2. The Austria v Commission and Belgium v Commission ‘student mobility’ cases</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3. Criticism against the Court</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4. Reaction to the Court’s judgments: a quota regulation system for medical studies</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.5. The Bressol judgment</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.6. Conclusion</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Student Mobility: Cross-Border Access to Financial Support for Education</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Building the EU Internal Market Based on Free Competition for Higher Education</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conclusion</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The European Court of Justice, Member State Autonomy and European Union Citizenship: Conjunctions and Disjunctions
Dora KOSTAKOPOULOU                                                        | 175  |

1. Introduction                                                          | 175  |
2. European Union Citizenship as an Experimental Institution             | 177  |
   2.1. EU Citizenship as a Fundamental Status                             | 180  |
   2.2. Family Reunification                                              | 186  |
   2.3. Non-Discriminatory Restrictions                                    | 190  |
PART IV.
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

The Case of Fundamental Rights: a State of Ambivalence
Loïc Azoulai ....................................................... 207

1. Introduction. The Question has Changed ............................. 207
2. Playing with the Scope of the Protection: the Liberty of the State........ 208
3. Designing the Constraints: the Independence of the State .............. 211
4. Conceptualising the Rights: the Identity of the State ................... 214
5. Conclusion ......................................................... 217

Fundamental Rights Jurisprudence Between Member States’ Prerogatives
and Citizens’ Autonomy
Dagmar Schiek ..................................................... 219

1. Introduction ..................................................................... 219
2. The Notion of Fundamental Rights – Autonomy of Human Beings...... 220
3. The Multi-Layered Context of Fundamental Rights in the European
   Union ........................................................................... 222
   3.1. Protecting Fundamental Rights Alongside Economic Integration .. 223
   3.2. Functions of the Court’s Fundamental Rights Protection .......... 225
   3.3. Multi-Polar Dilemmas Underlying the Court’s Fundamental
        Rights Case Law .................................................... 227
4. Recent ECJ Case Law Between EU, Citizens and Member States ......... 228
   4.1. A Quantitative Appetizer ........................................... 228
   4.2. Substantive Assessment of Some Neuralgic Fields .................. 229
   4.2.1. Assumptions and adequate fields ............................... 229
   4.2.2. Non-discrimination and equality .................................. 231
   4.2.3. Collective labour rights between fundamental freedoms
          and fundamental rights. ........................................... 236
5. Conclusion ........................................................................ 242
Annex: List of Cases Evaluated .............................................. 244

A Pluralistic Europe of Rights
Marta Cartabia ........................................................... 259

1. Introduction ..................................................................... 259
2. The New Millennium and the Flourishing of a ‘Europe of Rights’
   2.1. The Tanja Kreil Case ............................................. 263
   2.2. The Schmidberger and Omega Cases ......................... 264
   2.3. K.B., Richards and Tadao Maruko Cases .................... 265
   2.4. Cases on Terrorism ............................................. 268
   2.5. A Panoramic Overview ........................................... 269
3. ... and of a ‘European Court of Rights’ .......................... 270
4. ‘United in Diversity’ at Risk ....................................... 272
5. Looking for an Antidote ............................................. 275

PART V.
PROCEDURAL AUTONOMY OF THE STATES

The “Procedural Autonomy” of Member States and the Constraints
Stemming from the ECJ’s Case Law: Is Judicial Activism Still Necessary?
Adelina Adinolfi ................................................... 281

1. Introduction ........................................................ 281
2. The Constraints on “Procedural Autonomy” of the Member States:
   the extent of the discretionary power of the Court in the assessment
   of the adequacy of national procedures. ................................. 284
3. The Critical Reactions Caused by the Judicial Limitation of
   “Procedural Autonomy” of Member States .............................. 286
   4.1. Supremacy of EU law ........................................... 291
   4.2. Uniform Application of EU law .................................. 294
   4.3. The Fundamental Right to Obtain Judicial Protection .......... 296
5. A Tentative Paradigm to Explain the Court’s Unsteady Approach in
   Assessing Adequacy of National Procedural Law ...................... 299
6. Conclusion .......................................................... 302

Why There is No Principle of “Procedural Autonomy” of
the Member States
Michal Bobek ....................................................... 305

1. Introduction ........................................................ 305
2. The Orthodoxy ........................................................ 305
3. The Cases ........................................................... 307
4. The Theories ........................................................ 309
5. The Requirements ................................................... 312
   5.1. Equivalence .................................................... 312
   5.2. Effectiveness .................................................... 316
   5.3. Their Relationship ............................................... 317
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. The Misunderstanding</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Conclusion</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National Voice and European Loyalty. Member State Autonomy, European Remedies and Constitutional Pluralism in EU Law

Daniel Sarmiento .................................................................................................................. 325

1. Exit, Voice, Loyalty and the Legitimacy of the European Court of Justice ........................................................................... 326
2. Member State Voice ................................................................................................................................................. 327
   2.1. Judicial Review of National Legislation ......................................... 327
   2.2. Judicial Review of National Judicial Action ................................... 330
   2.3. Judicial Review of the Pouvoir Constituant ................................... 336
   2.4. Constitutional Voice and Non-Constitutional Claims ..................... 338
3. Individual Voice ....................................................................................................................................................... 339
4. Autonomy through Pluralism ................................................................................................................................. 342

PART VI.
CONCLUDING REMARKS – THE RIGHT’S DIMENSION

The ECJ Between the Individual Citizen and the Member States – A Plea for a Judge-Made European Law on Remedies

Hans-W. Micklitz ................................................................................................................................. 349

1. The ECJ Between the Individual Citizen and the Autonomy of the Member States .................................................................. 349
2. RRP in a ‘New’ European Legal Order Having Its ‘Own’ Legal System  .................................................................................. 351
   2.1. The EU Legal Order Autonomous and/or Integrated .......................... 352
   2.2. Three European Legal Orders – Economic, Social and Citizen?  ...... 356
   2.3. A Rights Based Order – Economic, Fundamental, Social, Human, Citizen Rights .............................................................. 360
3. RRP – First, Second, Third … How Many Generations?  .............................................................................................. 364
   3.1. The Ambiguities of the Concept of Conferred or Attributed Competences ........................................................................... 364
   3.2. A Shaky Consensus – The Competence Divide in RRP s .................. 366
   3.3. Beyond Consensus – The Horizontal Implications of RRP s ............ 369
4. The Institutional Framework of Judge-Made European Law on Remedies .................................................................................. 373
   4.1. The Parameters: Judicial Co-operation, Organised Law Enforcement and Legitimacy in RRPs .................................................. 374
   4.2. Is the Concept of Subjective Rights a Procrustean Bed? .................. 376
      4.2.1. Prevalence of EU economic rights over social rights ................ 377
      4.2.2. The missing EU collective rights .................................................. 380
4.3. Competence (Constitutional) Boundaries in the Development of an EU Law on Remedies .................................................. 383
  4.3.1. The impact of the distinction between primary vs. secondary EU law on RRPs .................................................. 385
  4.3.2. The line between constitutional and non-constitutional RRPs .......................................................... 388

5. Thoughts on the Future for the EU Law on Remedies De Lege Lata ...... 392
  5.1. Constitutional Implications: a Right to Access in the Preliminary Reference Procedure .............................................. 393
  5.2. Substantive Implications: RRPs to Counterbalance the European Economic Order ................................................. 395
    5.2.1. From uniform application to uniform enforcement .......... 395
    5.2.2. The principle of effectiveness and the doctrine of economic efficiency .................................................. 397
    5.2.3. Materialising the principle of equivalence .................. 399

Index ..................................................................................... 401