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Editorial note

Bruno De Witte*

HOW MUCH CRITICAL DISTANCE IN THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF EUROPEAN LAW?

What is, in the field of European Union law, the proper role of academic scholars? And how, specifically, do they and should they relate to the work of the practitioners of European law who work in the various institutions of the European Union: in the Court of Justice, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the many other bodies and agencies? This kind of question is situated in a growing sub-field within the academic discipline of European Union law. That sub-field deals with self-reflection about the academic field itself. For instance, there are more and more contributions on the research methods to be used in dealing with EU law. There are also contributions by legal scholars on the sociology-and-politics of EU law academia. This essay fits into the latter category. It is about the sociology and politics of EU law as an academic discipline, but seen from one particular angle, namely the way in which EU law academic research is intertwined with the legal work accomplished by the European institutions.

Knowledge of European law is co-produced, on the one hand, by those whose profession is to produce knowledge (that is, scholars who are mostly based at universities) and, on the other hand, by those whose profession is to practise European law – by making, applying or interpreting European law, they also produce new knowledge. These practitioners work in law firms, in business and civil society organisations, and also, above all, in the institutions of the European Union. It is the latter group that interests me here: how does the co-production of EU law knowledge work between academics and legal practitioners based in the EU institutions?

I will look at the mutual engagement between these two groups of lawyers in two steps. The first step is to describe how the institutions act towards, and within, academia. The second step will be to look at how academics deal with the institutions. In both directions, we find that there are ‘close encounters’.

So, what are the main ways in which the EU institutions engage with the academic world, and especially with the little world of EU law scholarship?

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First, the EU institutions have always given, and are still giving, financial support to EU legal scholarship in many different ways:

- Through the funding of European Documentation Centres in many European universities, starting in the 1960s; these were made conditional upon the existence of teaching and research on European integration in the hosting institutions.
- Through the temporary funding of Jean Monnet chairs in European law, a scheme launched in 1989, and later complemented by the Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence.
- Through the funding of collective and individual research, both in the form of consultations requested by EU institutions on particular topics, and in the form of projects funded from the European Union budget, through the Horizon, Marie Curie, Jean Monnet and ERC grants.
- Through the funding of specialised academic institutions such as the College of Europe and the European University Institute, where the study of European law came to occupy a central place.
- And even through the funding of specialised journals, such as the European Equality Law Review.

It is clear that the European Union, especially the Commission, has actively and deliberately pursued the development of a specifically European dimension in the social sciences (law, political sciences, economics, history). This means that most EU law scholars, at one moment or another, have benefited from European Union funding for their research or teaching activities, and some of us, like myself, have directly or indirectly benefited from EU financial support throughout their whole career.

Next to financial support, a second way in which the institutions engage with EU law scholarship is when their members act like scholars themselves. Indeed, many practitioners of EU law are former academics, and some of them teach EU law courses at universities. Some of them publish textbooks on EU law, and articles in law journals. They give visiting lectures and speak at academic conferences. They sometimes sit on the editorial board of journals. This active presence of practitioners in the academic world of EU law has been described in the literature, most recently in an article by Päivi Leino-Sandberg.¹ There is an intellectual and social proximity between the world of scholarship and the world of legal practice, which is closer than in most other legal disciplines, certainly closer than in international law. The thin demarcation line is marked by the ritual sentence used by the practitioners from EU institutions when publishing their writings. They declare that the 'views and opinions expressed in their contribution are personal and do not bind in any way the institution' to which they belong. This ritual sentence is useful for the

¹ Päivi Leino-Sandberg, 'Enchantment and Critical Distance in EU Legal Scholarship: What Role for Institutional Lawyers?' (2022) 1 *European Law Open* 231.

academic audience, as it signals the opposite of what it says: it signals that we should be aware that, however interesting and competent those views are, they still stem from practitioners who owe a sense of loyalty to the institution for which they work, and we should read their publication in that light.

A third way in which the EU institutions seek interaction with academics is by organising direct dialogue on a topic of common interest. My impression is that this happens more frequently than before. The European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Central Bank regularly organise 'policy dialogues' or 'workshops', in which European policy initiatives are discussed by academics and members of independent think tanks – in other words, here the EU institution acts in listening mode.

In all these three modes of interaction, the European institutions have no problem in keeping a critical distance from what academics write or say. In fact, the European institutions do not depend on legal scholarship in the same way as they depend on scientific expert knowledge, for example on the question of climate change or energy prices. The main reason for this is that the European institutions have their own legal expertise in house. The Commission, Council, the European Parliament, and the European Central Bank have their own legal services, and many of their other officials who are not part of the legal service do have a legal training. And the Court of Justice is, of course, entirely in the hands of jurists, both among the judges and among the *référéndaires*. This diminishes the need to reach out for academic input to find solutions for their daily legal problems.

It does not mean that academic research is considered entirely superfluous. It may occasionally have a policy impact, and sometimes we see concrete evidence of this.

But, generally speaking, we do not know to what extent EU law practitioners take note of, or are being influenced by, academic research. Even if they do, the translation of such influence into the content of EU law depends on internal hierarchies and the political choices imposed through them. Notes by the legal services of the EU institutions do not refer, or only very exceptionally, to legal writing. We do, however, find numerous references to academic work in impact assessment reports that accompany new proposals for EU legislation. The Court of Justice never refers to legal writing in its judgments, but some Advocates General refer to academic writing, and many scholars are secretly proud when one of their writings happens to be cited in an Opinion of an Advocate General, especially when cited approvingly.

Let me now look at the other side of the divide, at the way in which academics engage with the work of the European institutions.

The reasons why legal scholars are seeking close encounters with the EU's institutional life are diverse. The main, and most obvious, reason is

that EU law scholars based at universities also teach EU law. Teaching in law schools is supposed to reflect the state of the law, and the state of European law depends on what the European institutions do. So, EU law scholars must necessarily take an interest in the activities of the legal practitioners in the EU institutions in order for their teaching to be relevant. Through their teaching, they diffuse legal knowledge to new generations of jurists and that knowledge will then indirectly affect the work of the EU institutions when some of these students become practitioners in the EU institutions. This is what one could call the traditional virtuous circle of EU knowledge production. The institutions make, apply, and interpret EU law, and the academics systematise it and transmit it to their students so as to prepare them, in turn, for making and applying EU law. It explains why a lot of EU legal writing is in explanatory mode. As EU law developments are often confusing and complicated, academics see it as their task to present developments in a structured way. Even though such presentations may include some critical comments, their primary purpose is expository. There is nothing wrong with this. I have done a lot of this kind of writing myself, including not so long ago an article on the Covid recovery plan Next Generation EU (NGEU), where my principal task was to explain what the European Union institutions had actually been doing, legally speaking, in those hectic Covid-dominated months of 2020.²

However, not all of us need to do this kind of work, and certainly not all the time. The fact that we have to know what the EU institutions do in order to properly teach EU law does not mean that our own research must be in this explanatory mode. Many scholars, instead, approach the work of EU institutions in a critical mode or in legal change mode, in order to advocate improvements in European law.

Such advocacy scholarship, in EU law and other fields, has recently been the object of a debate that was sparked by the publication of articles by Komarek and Khaitan.³ I do not want to engage with that debate here, but my general view is that it is perfectly appropriate for legal scholars to advocate legal change. Jurists have always done this. This is reflected in the famous and age-old distinction between the *lex lata* and the *lex ferenda*. Traditionally, legal scholars would describe the law as it stood after some new judgment or new piece of legislation, and then, towards the end of their piece, they would either say that they were entirely happy with these developments, or they would present their own, better, legal view that should be adopted in the future: the *lex ferenda*. What has changed in recent times is that advocates of legal change are supposed not just to state their own preferred views but also to make a sustained argument

² Bruno De Witte, 'The European Union's COVID-19 Recovery Plan: The Legal Engineering of an Economic Policy Shift' (2021) 58 Common Market Law Review 635.

³ Jan Komarek, 'Freedom and Power of European Constitutional Scholarship' (2021) 17 European Constitutional Law Review 422; Tarunabh Khaitan, 'On Scholactivism in Constitutional Studies: Skeptical Thoughts' (2022) 20 International Journal of Constitutional Law 547.

why those views are sound, possibly by reference to insights from social science or political philosophy. And, of course, advocacy should never lead us to ignore or distort the legal reality. Advocating reform of the law presupposes a sharp understanding of what the current state of the law is, because otherwise the advocacy will lead to nothing.

However, many people consider that EU legal research, taken as a whole, is not sufficiently critical of the work of EU institutions. The close ties between EU legal scholars and legal practitioners, which I described before, is not something of the past but continues to exist today and is a source of concern for some observers. For example, in the article by Päivi Leino-Sandberg mentioned above, she writes that 'EU legal academia should maintain a greater distance from the institutions [...] and re-define its self-identity as a reflective and critical force, rather than one mainly focusing on legitimating EU action'.⁴

At this point, I think we have to admit that most EU law scholars do feel supportive of the European integration project, not for career reasons, and not because of pressure exerted on them, but because of their personal trajectory. Many European law academics work in other countries than their own and, if not, have spent years abroad. They may have grown up in multinational families, or created such a multinational family themselves. For them, their own life is connected to the European integration process, and to the new opportunities and experiences it has created and facilitated. But even if you have spent all your working life in, say, Spain or Croatia, the choice to become a scholar of European law is not an innocent one. It typically comes with a commitment to the project, to a sense that the European Union, as an organisation, is a very useful one, in that it helps all its member states to face common challenges, and that it helps – in some way – to preserve personal freedom and the welfare state.

In my own case, I realise that this basically supportive stance towards European integration has influenced my thinking and my writing. It led me to participate in research projects launched and funded by the European institutions. It also led me to support legal choices made in Brussels or in Luxembourg which others found legally problematic. For example, last year, I published the article in the *Common Market Law Review* on the Covid recovery plan that I mentioned before. It was entitled 'The European Union's Covid Recovery Plan: The Legal Engineering of an Economic Policy Shift'. As the title implied, I considered that the adoption of the recovery plan had been made possible by creative legal engineering from the side of the EU institutions and their legal services, but I argued that this legal creativity was acceptable and had been done for a good cause. More generally, in my view, the European Union needs to have the capacity to act in order to face numerous challenges that affect all its member states: the Treaty framework occasionally makes this

⁴ Leino-Sandberg (n 1) 256.

difficult, and some legal creativity is then not only acceptable but actually desirable. Others have criticised this position, by emphasising that our main task, as academics, is to critically control whether the Court and the EU's political institutions respect the constitutional framework which the member states established when negotiating the European treaties.⁵

I submit that one should not be apologetic about having sympathy for the European integration project and showing this in one's work. But this does not mean that we should not keep a critical distance from the work of the EU institutions and from the views expressed by legal practitioners in the academic domain. That distance comes most naturally when academics write about the kinds of things that practitioners do not write about and are nevertheless important for the construction of knowledge of EU law, such as theoretical reflections on the nature of the European legal order, or on the nature of the EU's economic constitution. But that critical distance should also be there when scholars engage in their main activity, which is to explain and comment on what is going on concretely in the field of EU law.

That critical assessment can be both internal and external. The internal one is by those who work on questions of EU legality by identifying the legal quality of the reasoning in a judgment or of a legal choice made by a European institution. The external one is by those who work on the question of EU legitimacy by examining the conditions under which rules of EU law emerge, or the impact that EU law rules have on social reality.

The *internal* critique is ubiquitous. All EU legal scholars practise it. In fact, I really wonder why it is still said that most EU legal scholars uncritically support the Court of Justice. If one looks at case comments in any of the EU legal journals, the majority of them are quite critical of the Court's reasoning. To simply reiterate what the Court decided, and to silently approve its reasoning, has become the exception and is, indeed, frowned upon in academic circles. Critical comments have become the rule, and have become a sign of scholarly distinction. This also applies to the work of the other EU institutions: when new EU legislation is proposed or adopted, scholarly analysis is, more often than not, accompanied by a critique of the legal logic or consistency of what was done.

External critique of the functioning of the EU institutions is less common, but it is a growing part of European legal scholarship. It looks at the conditions under which EU law rules or judgments emerge or at the impact that they have on social reality, both inside and outside Europe, or at their distributive consequences. That kind of work looks at European law in its broader political, economic, or cultural context, and often engages with interdisciplinary approaches. In many academic settings, this kind of work is nowadays encouraged. In some countries, it is

⁵ See, also with reference to the EU's Covid recovery plan, Päivi Leino-Sandberg and Mathias Ruffert, 'Next Generation EU and Its Constitutional Ramifications: A Critical Assessment' (2022) 59 Common Market Law Review 433.

still frowned upon, because it is considered not to be the proper way of doing legal research. But this is not, I should add, because of any pressure from the side of the European institutions. Indeed, my feeling is that EU legal scholars are, these days, in almost all European countries, freer than ever in choosing the object and method of their research, of doing doctrinal work or law-in-context, in being supportive of what the EU institutions do, or not. European law today is a pluralist academic field, and that is a precious thing.



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THE EU REGULATION ON THE IMPORT OF CULTURAL GOODS: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN EU CULTURAL PROPERTY LEGISLATION?

Tamás Szabados*

Abstract: The EU has recently decided to regulate the import of cultural goods in the EU. While the new provisions have been widely criticised for various reasons, primarily for having a freezing effect on the European art trade, it cannot be overlooked that the regulation of the import of works of art is not unprecedented, either in international, regional and national legal instruments or at the level of EU legislation. The new legislation can be considered a paradigm shift. It completes the pre-existing EU legal sources that primarily aimed to protect cultural goods originating from the EU and provides equal and symmetric protection for cultural goods arriving from third countries. In this way, the EU regulation transcends a self-centred regional approach and embodies a global vision of the protection of cultural heritage.

Keywords: cultural goods, art trade, import, licence, policy change.

1 Introduction

The divergences of the rules on importing cultural goods are a clear incentive to illicit trafficking. The fact that a state prohibits the export of a cultural object from its territory does not mean that the unlawfully exported cultural object cannot be lawfully imported into another state and cannot be subject to transactions there.¹ Illicit trade moves such objects towards states with no or only relatively lenient import regulations. This is why an (ideally uniform) regulation of importing cultural objects is desirable.

Taking the above concerns into account as well, the import of stolen or illegally exported cultural property has been the subject of international, regional and national regulation for some decades. The UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO Con-

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¹ Claudia S Quiñones Vilá, 'On the Borderline: Using National and International Legal Frameworks to Address the Traffic of Pre-Columbian Antiquities between Mexico and the United States' (2021) 7 Santander Art and Culture Law Review 51, 54; see Paul M Bator, 'An Essay on the International Trade in Art' (1982) 34 Stanford Law Review 275, 287.

vention),² the Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological, Historical, and Artistic Heritage of the American Nations adopted in the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS),³ and some domestic legislation have similarly addressed the import of cultural property. The legislature of the European Union (EU) decided to act on the regulation of the importation of cultural property from third countries only recently. The result is the adoption of Regulation 2019/880/EU on the introduction and the import of cultural goods (EU Import Regulation)⁴ and the accompanying Regulation 2021/1079/EU that implements the EU Import Regulation (Implementing Regulation).⁵

The EU Import Regulation has had an ambivalent welcome so far. Urbinati considered the proposal for the regulation as a means of contributing to a 'more complete and efficient' EU legal framework for fighting against illicit art trade.⁶ There are commentators who contend that the EU Import Regulation could have been more effective in certain respects.⁷ For others, especially art traders and their representative organisations, it is too much; they assume that, once fully applicable, it will be too strict and will unnecessarily limit the art market due to the attendant administrative and financial burden imposed on art dealers.⁸ This is why it has

² Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 823 UNTS 231, Paris, 14 November 1970.

³ Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological, Historical, and Artistic Heritage of the American Nations (Convention of San Salvador) 16 June 1976. See Richard Mackenzie-Gray Scott, 'The European Union's Approach to Trade Restrictions on Cultural Property: A Trendsetter for the Protection of Cultural Property in Other Regions?' (2016) 2 *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 211.

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2019/880 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the introduction and the import of cultural goods [2019] OJ L151/1.

⁵ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1079 of 24 June 2021 laying down detailed rules for implementing certain provisions of Regulation (EU) 2019/880 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the introduction and the import of cultural goods [2021] OJ L234/67. See Giuditta Giardini, 'A Commentary to Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1079 of 24 June 2021 Laying Down Detailed Rules for Implementing Certain Provisions of Regulation (EU) 2019/880 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Introduction and the Import of Cultural Goods' (2021) 7 *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 183.

⁶ Sabrina Urbinati, 'The European Union Legal Framework and the Fight against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property Coming from Situations of Armed Conflict' (2018) 4 *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 51, 66.

⁷ Lewis McNaught, 'EU-wide Regulation Aims to Prevent Illegal Trafficking into European States' (*Returning Heritage*, 1 October 2019) <<https://www.returningheritage.com/eu-wide-regulation-aims-to-prevent-illegal-trafficking-into-european-states>> accessed 10 April 2022.

⁸ See Erika Bochereau talks to Alicja Jagielska-Burduk and Andrzej Jakubowski, 'Challenges and Prospects for the Art Market Vis-à-vis the Evolving EU Regime for Counteracting Illicit Trade in Cultural Objects' (2021) 7 *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 21, 25.

been labelled ‘Draconian’⁹ or more emphatically ‘fundamentally flawed’,¹⁰ and it was also stated that ‘the regulation is likely to cripple European art markets’.¹¹ Furthermore, the way in which the EU Import Regulation was adopted was described as ‘the handing down of orders in a dictatorial manner’.¹² It was also asserted that the Regulation can weaken the position of the EU on the art trade market.¹³ In this view, due to the EU Import Regulation, fewer artefacts will be imported into the EU due to the strict import regime, and the art trade may move to other art trade centres of the world. Finally, it was warned that ‘without effective implementation the Regulation risks becoming no more than a paper tiger; impressive on paper but not nearly as daunting or effective in practice’.¹⁴

The purpose of this contribution is to examine how the provisions of the EU Import Regulation fit into the traditional paradigms of the protection of cultural property. To answer this question, the two traditional approaches of cultural property protection will first be scrutinised. Then, the article discusses the main rules of the EU Import Regulation. Although the EU Import Regulation by nature imposes restrictions on the art trade that let the representatives of traders speak of the freezing effect of the regulation, a comparative analysis demonstrates that the rules of the EU Import Regulation criticised by them are not without precedent. Nevertheless, the gradually evolving cultural property legislation in the EU points to a paradigm shift, or at least to a new policy approach, which integrates the protection of the cultural heritage of both Member States and third countries.

2 The traditional paradigms of cultural property and their critics

In cultural property protection discourse, following Merryman, two paradigms or ways of thinking about cultural property have been distinguished: cultural internationalism and cultural nationalism.¹⁵

Cultural internationalism treats cultural goods as part of the common cultural heritage of mankind and, as a corollary, it underscores the

⁹ Kate Fitz Gibbon, ‘Art Imports to EU Threatened by Draconian Regulation’ (*Cultural Property News*, 29 December 2018) <<https://culturalpropertynews.org/art-imports-to-eu-threatened-by-draconian-regulation/>> accessed 10 April 2022.

¹⁰ Pierre Valentin and Fionnuala Rogers, ‘The Proposed EU Regulations on the Import of Cultural Goods’ (*Art@Law*) <<https://www.artatlaw.com/latest-articles/the-proposed-eu-regulations-on-the-import-of-cultural-goods>> accessed 10 April 2022.

¹¹ Fitz Gibbon (n 9).

¹² Ivan Macquisten, ‘No EU Problem with Terrorist Antiquities, So Let’s Legislate for It’ (*Cultural Property News*) <<https://culturalpropertynews.org/no-eu-problem-with-terrorist-antiquities-so-lets-legislate-for-it-says-commission/>> accessed 10 April 2022.

¹³ Valentin and Rogers (n 10).

¹⁴ Anna M de Jong, ‘The Cultural Goods Import Regime of Regulation (EU) 2019/880: Four Potential Pitfalls’ (2021) 7 *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 31, 33 and 37.

¹⁵ John Henry Merryman, ‘Two Ways of Thinking About Cultural Property’ (1986) 80 *American Journal of International Law* 831; John Henry Merryman, ‘Cultural Property Internationalism’ (2005) 12 *International Journal of Cultural Property* 11.

importance of ensuring access for all to the common cultural heritage. Its vision is the facilitation of the international flow of works of art in commerce by eliminating excessive and unnecessary trade obstacles. Excessive regulation stifles the art market and encourages illegal trade in art. This approach is shared by the so-called market countries, where there is high demand for cultural valuables originating from source countries. Merryman found that the 1954 Hague Convention embodies cultural internationalism¹⁶ when it protects cultural property as the cultural heritage of all mankind, the preservation of which is necessary for all peoples of the world. This is completed by establishing individual responsibility for offences against cultural property and enabling the courts of the contracting states to proceed in such instances.

Cultural nationalism, on the contrary, treats cultural goods as elements of the national cultural heritage, and therefore tends to exclude or restrict international trade, and in particular the export of goods considered as components of the national cultural heritage. This approach is mostly relied on by so-called source countries rich in cultural property. The 1970 UNESCO Convention is seen as a manifestation of cultural nationalism. To prevent the de-contextualisation of cultural property, the 1970 UNESCO Convention provides for the protection of cultural goods by their country of origin. According to critics, no limit is imposed on states as to the determination of the cultural property to be protected by way of prohibiting its exportation. Whether or not to grant an export restriction depends on the discretion of state authorities. Excessive export restrictions result in a policy of retentive nationalism in source countries and limits the room for the licit art trade. The 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage goes even further when it states that the underwater cultural heritage cannot be commercially exploited. Excessively limiting or excluding trade in cultural property may also hinder transactions concerning cultural goods which do not have cultural significance or a strong cultural bond to the country prohibiting the export. A corollary of the idea of the 1970 UNESCO Convention, that cultural property belongs to its country of origin, is that countries of origin are entitled to the return of cultural property illegally removed from there.

Even though scholarly works often take the two conflicting paradigms as granted,¹⁷ some authors have called into question the dichotomy between cultural internationalism and cultural nationalism. Alternative approaches have been proposed to overcome the short-sightedness of the two ways outlined above. Criticisms have been formulated from diverse angles. It is not only the oversimplified conflict between the necessity for and rejection of regulation that has been criticised, but also the one-track state- and institution-centred thinking underlying the narratives.

¹⁶ Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 249 UNTS 216, The Hague, 14 May 1954.

¹⁷ Lucas Lixinski, 'A Third Way of Thinking about Cultural Property' (2019) 44 *Brooklyn Journal of International Law* 563, 572.

As to the elimination of the obstacles to the free flow of works of art raised by state legislation, it cannot be ignored that Merryman himself qualified his position, acknowledging that 'no thinking person argues for free trade in cultural property'.¹⁸ Regulation is necessary for preserving cultural property and to promote its lawful commerce. The reality is that both source and market countries adopt certain restrictions to the commerce of cultural objects, and the free movement of cultural property remains a somewhat theoretical possibility. The 1954 Hague Convention, deemed to be a manifestation of cultural internationalism, does not primarily address the trade-related aspects of cultural property protection. As such, it is difficult to consider it as a point of departure in a debate about free or regulated art trade. The question is rather where the borderline lies between necessary and excessive regulation. Other authors unequivocally advocate a controlled legal art trade. In this vein, Bauer argues that illegal art trade cannot be entirely excluded, but controlled licit trade contributes to meeting at least part of the demand for cultural goods.¹⁹ The revenues from this licit commerce would enrich source countries and not traffickers. Cultural property appearing in the trade should be widely distributed among states and museums, and state practice should not be reluctant to issue export licences when it is not justified to keep the object in its country of origin.

Others insist on transcending the state- and institution-centred approach inherent in cultural nationalism and internationalism. Lixinski hence claims that binary thinking about cultural property excludes communities who are living in, with or around cultural heritage.²⁰ A third way of thinking about the international governance of cultural property should include communities. Finally, there is also a view that cultural heritage debates are characterised by indeterminacy and cannot be channelled into the duality of cultural nationalism and internationalism.²¹ Addressing such debates is possible if based on a plurality of approaches and by including external factors, such as human rights, into the decision-making process.

To be able to place the EU Import Regulation on the scale of cultural property paradigms, we first have to examine the provisions of the EU Import Regulation in a comparative context. It will be argued that, with the EU Import Regulation, the EU goes beyond the simple protection of cultural goods originating from EU Member States and extends the protection to the cultural heritage of third countries as well. This represents a paradigm shift for EU cultural property legislation, moving away from an

¹⁸ Merryman, 'Cultural Property Internationalism' (n 15) 12.

¹⁹ Alexander A Bauer, 'New Ways of Thinking About Cultural Property: A Critical Appraisal of the Antiquities Trade Debates' (2007) 31 *Fordham International Law Journal* 690, 714–716.

²⁰ Lixinski (n 17) 563.

²¹ Pauno Soirila, 'Indeterminacy in the Cultural Property Restitution Debate' (2022) 28 *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 1, 12–13.

inward-looking legislative approach towards the recognition of the need to protect the cultural heritage of any state.

3 The main rules of the EU Import Regulation

To understand the policy approach of the EU Import Regulation, its provisions must first be put under scrutiny. As a general prohibition clause, Article 3(1) of the EU Import Regulation states that it is prohibited to import those cultural goods listed in Part A of its Annex that were created or discovered in a third country and which were removed illegally from that country. To fall under the rules of the EU Import Regulation, the cultural object must have been created or discovered in a third country. Those works of art which originate from the EU are not covered by the Regulation, even if they are intended to be re-imported after their exportation from the EU at some point in the past.²²

The EU Import Regulation thereafter distinguishes two categories of cultural goods enumerated in two lists in its Annex (Part B and Part C): first, cultural goods, the importation of which is subject to an import licence, and second, those subject to the less demanding requirement of an importer statement.

First, the import of the most endangered cultural goods requires an import licence. Archaeological troves and dismembered elements of artistic or historical monuments or archaeological sites older than 250 years are subject to an import licence independently of their value (Part B of Annex). An application for an import licence must be filed with the competent authority of the Member State where the cultural goods are subject to customs procedures, and the import licence issued is valid throughout the EU. The burden of proof is placed on the importer to demonstrate the lawful export of the cultural goods. The application must be accompanied by supporting documents (export certificate or export licence) proving that the cultural goods were lawfully exported from the country where they were created or discovered or that no export regulation existed in the country concerned.

Second, the importation of the other category of cultural goods, which are deemed to be less in danger, presupposes an importer statement (Part C of Annex). A diverse group of cultural goods belong to this category, provided that they are more than 200 years old and have a value of more than EUR 18,000. The importer statement consists of a declaration by the holder of the goods on the lawfulness of the export from the country where the cultural goods were created or discovered and of the description of the objects.²³ The application for an import licence and the submission of the importer's statement must be made on a standardised template and in the format determined by the Commission and through a

²² Stella Sarapani, 'The Import of Cultural Goods under EU and Greek Law: A Critical Outlook' (2021) 7 *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 203, 209–210.

²³ EU Import Regulation, Art 5(1).

centralised electronic system, to be established by the Commission under the EU Import Regulation.

Exceptionally, in the case of both the import licence and the importer statement, it suffices to prove alternatively that the cultural goods lawfully left the last country where they had been located for a period of more than five years, provided that the country where the cultural goods were created or discovered cannot be reliably determined or the cultural goods were exported from the country of creation or discovery before 24 April 1972, ie the date of the entry into force of the UNESCO Convention. This provision raises several questions. The EU Import Regulation does not expound what standard is to determine that the source country cannot be 'reliably determined'. The burden of proof is on the holder of the cultural goods. The content of the standard, and thus the conditions and the scope of the above exception, may be established by national courts if an applicant has recourse to these against a decision of the competent authority. Ultimately, the Court of Justice of the European Union may be requested to clarify the content of this exception in a preliminary ruling procedure. The choice of the date of the entry into force of the UNESCO Convention may be justified by the fact that the Convention requires states parties to introduce export certificates in order to demonstrate that the export of cultural property falling under the scope of application of the convention was authorised, and such an export certificate should accompany all items of cultural property exported.²⁴ Nevertheless, the five-year exception rule related to import licences and importer statements may be considered an incentive to ignore the previous unlawful export of the same artefact that took place before 1972. A further problem is when the date of the export cannot be ascertained.²⁵ This is because, first, it is crucial to determine whether export took place before or after 24 April 1972 and, second, because the date of export is the relevant time for establishing the rules applicable to the export of the cultural goods concerned, including whether there was any export legislation in force at all in the country of creation or discovery at the time of the export.

The EU Import Regulation recognises certain exceptions to the requirements on the import licence and the importer statement (eg, returning goods; the import of cultural goods for safekeeping; the temporary admission of cultural goods for the purposes of education, science, conservation, restoration, exhibition, and cooperation between museums). Instead of an import licence, an importer statement is sufficient if the cultural goods are brought to the EU for the purpose of exhibiting them at a commercial art fair; an import licence is required, however, if the goods are intended to be sold thereafter in the EU.

The EU Import Regulation gives Member States some leeway. The consequences of the breach of import rules is determined by the Member

²⁴ UNESCO Convention, Art 6(a).

²⁵ Fitz Gibbon (n 9); Valentin and Rogers (n 10).

States. It is for the Member States to determine what sorts of measures national authorities have to take when there is an attempt to introduce cultural goods exported illegally from other countries to the EU,²⁶ and the penalties.²⁷

At the same time, the EU Import Regulation does not answer certain questions. It does not give guidance on what happens to an object seized by the authorities if it cannot or could not have been imported into the EU. The EU Import Regulation does not regulate the restitution or return of cultural goods.²⁸ This is left to diplomatic channels, as well as to international and domestic legal provisions. Here, the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects may have a role for those EU Member States which ratified it.²⁹

Private law effects are not addressed by the EU Import Regulation, including the question of ownership and possible restitution to an owner.³⁰ The EU Import Regulation limits itself to laying down public law rules on the import of cultural goods into the EU and the related administrative procedure. Therefore, the issuance of an import licence does not prove the licit provenance or the ownership of the cultural goods.³¹ Addressing the private law implications of the transactions related to works of art remains a deficiency of EU law.

Although the EU Import Regulation entered into force on 27 June 2019, its most essential provisions will only be applied from a later date.³² The prohibition on the import of illegally exported cultural goods applies from 28 December 2020, while the requirements on the import licence and the importer statement will apply from the date on which the central electronic system becomes operational, or at the latest from 28 June 2025. Regarding the central electronic system, the Commission has recently adopted more detailed provisions in the Implementing Regulation and it must be operational at the latest four years after the entry into force of the first implementing act.³³ Even though the EU Import Regu-

²⁶ EU Import Regulation, Art 3(1); Urbinati (n 6) 67-68.

²⁷ EU Import Regulation, Art 11(1); Urbinati (n 6) 68.

²⁸ European Commission, Fact Sheet, Questions and Answers on the illegal import of cultural goods used to finance terrorism. Brussels, 13 July 2017.

²⁹ UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, Rome, 24 June 1995.

³⁰ European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document, Impact Assessment Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the import of cultural goods, Brussels, SWD(2017) 262 final, 21.

³¹ EU Import Regulation, Art 4(3).

³² EU Import Regulation, Art 16.

³³ EU Import Regulation, Art 9. See also the report of the Commission on the progress of the implementation of the electronic system: Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council pursuant to Article 14(3) of Regulation (EU) 2019/880 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the introduction and the import of cultural goods Brussels COM(2020) 342 final.

lation has not yet entered into force, its provisions and policy approach have been subject to criticism for various reasons.

4 Critical voices in relation to the EU Import Regulation

Well before its starting date of application, the EU Import Regulation has been subject to much criticism, in particular on the part of the representatives of the art trade. Counterarguments against the solutions of the EU Import Regulation are manifold. First, it is argued that the scope of application of the Regulation has not been appropriately determined. On the one hand, the scope of application is found too broad and has raised objections, primarily from representatives of antiquarian book sellers, that the EU Import Regulation compounds various types of cultural goods without due regard to their particularities.³⁴ On the other hand, the categorisation of the cultural goods covered and the minimum financial threshold set for the cultural goods listed in Part C is criticised for making a difference between important and less important cultural property.³⁵ Accordingly, the Regulation ignores that mass trade in small value goods can cause significant harm to cultural heritage and be a source of income for terrorist organisations. Second, it is stressed that it puts an unnecessary administrative and financial burden on art dealers, especially on small businesses. The import licence and importer system may cause additional costs and delay in conducting deals that may deter dealers from bringing cultural goods into the EU for sale. In particular, the 90-day deadline for deciding on an application for an import licence seems to be too long from the perspective of market players. The extent to which this can be counterbalanced by the supporting measures of the Commission, adequate technical assistance and the provision of information to small and medium-sized enterprises, as envisaged by the EU Import Regulation, is questionable.³⁶ In any case, the Implementing Regulation does not specifically address the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises. Third, sometimes it might be difficult to determine the country of creation or discovery, the export regulations of which should be taken into consideration, the exact date of exportation, and to prove the lawfulness of the earlier exportation(s) of an art object. As such, it is contended that the application of the EU Import Regulation may result in the otherwise lawful legal trade in and the import of cultural goods being restrained if no supporting documents can be provided

³⁴ Eleni Polycarpou, Diana Wierbicki and Amanda A Rottermund, 'Tick Tock: Regulations on the Import of Non-EU-cultural Goods Are Now in Effect. How Will This Affect the International Art Market?' (*Withersworldwide*, 27 June 2019) <<https://www.withersworldwide.com/en-gb/insight/tick-tock-regulations-on-the-import-of-non-eu-cultural-goods-are-now-in-effect-how-will-this-affect-the-international-art-market>> accessed 10 April 2022.

³⁵ Neil Brodie, 'Heart of Confusion? EU Regulation 2019/880 on the Import of Cultural Goods and the Fight against Terrorism' (*Market of Mass Destruction*, 17 January 2020) <<https://marketmassdestruction.com/heart-of-confusion-eu-regulation-2019-880-on-the-import-of-cultural-goods-and-the-fight-against-terrorism/>> accessed 10 April 2022.

³⁶ EU Import Regulation, Recital 28.

by the holder of the goods.³⁷ The EU Import Regulation introduces the presumption of illegality, and the importer has to demonstrate that the export was legal. This indeed causes the problem that if a lawful export took place after 1972 and then the cultural goods were subject to a series of commercial transactions, but there is no available documentation proving the lawfulness of the export (eg because it was not passed to a subsequent purchaser or otherwise disappeared in the meantime), the goods cannot be imported, even though their export had been lawful. Finally, it has been argued that the EU legislature failed to justify the need for the import legislation appropriately, because no evidence had been put forward to demonstrate that trade in looted art objects in the EU is significant or that it really contributes to financing terrorist organisations or money laundering.³⁸ Overall, these factors may have a negative impact on the role and prospects of the EU art market.

The practice related to the EU Import Regulation will demonstrate to what extent this criticism is well founded. However, we have to wait for the time being. Undoubtedly, the EU Import Regulation places an additional burden on importers. This may affect in particular non-professional importers who also have to comply with the provisions of the EU Import Regulation even if they lack expertise. However, the rules of the Regulation encourage importers and buyers to act with due diligence when acquiring a cultural object. Even though the Regulation does not unfold in detail the content of due diligence, its approach seems to be in line with the UNIDROIT Convention in this respect. Under the UNIDROIT Convention, a possessor of a stolen or illegally exported cultural object, who has to return it, is entitled to compensation only if he acted with due diligence when acquiring it.³⁹

In my view, it is premature to conclude that the new rules will either deter the flow of works of art to the EU or stifle the European art market. As will be demonstrated in the next part of this article, several states, including important market countries, such as Switzerland and the US, already now apply certain import controls. No significant fallback was noticed in the art markets concerned due to the introduction of import restrictions. Therefore, it cannot be directly deduced from the existence of import restrictions that the EU art market will shrink. The significance of the rules and policy approach of the EU Import Regulation can be properly evaluated if we consider them in comparison with the legislative solutions of states regulating the import of cultural goods, as well as in the context of the extant EU cultural property protection regime.

³⁷ Valentin and Rogers (n 10).

³⁸ Kate Fitz Gibbon, 'Critical Comments Rain Down on Draft EU Regulations' (*Cultural Property News*, 21 April 2021) <<https://culturalpropertynews.org/critical-comments-rain-down-on-draft-eu-regulations/>> accessed 10 April 2022; Brodie (n 35).

³⁹ UNIDROIT Convention, Arts 4 and 6.

5 The place of the EU Import Regulation from a comparative perspective and in the context of the existing EU cultural property protection regime

The introduction of import restrictions by the EU does not seem unique. There are international, regional and national legal instruments addressing the import of cultural goods that lay down certain restrictions. Moreover, even in the EU, the regulation of the import of cultural property is not entirely untried and the solutions of the EU Import Regulation by and large fit in with the pre-existing regulatory technique of the EU legislature.

5.1 Rules on importation at a comparative glance

First of all, the UNESCO Convention contains some provisions related to the importation of cultural property. It declares that any import effected contrary to the provisions of the convention is illicit.⁴⁰ The UNESCO Convention requires states parties to undertake to prohibit the import of cultural property stolen from a museum or a religious or secular public monument in another state party, provided that such property appears in the inventory of the institution concerned.⁴¹ The country of origin can request the state party where the cultural property is located to take appropriate steps to recover and return any such cultural property.⁴² In the case of a claim for return, an innocent purchaser or a person who has valid title to that property is entitled to just compensation. In the event of risk of pillage of its archaeological or ethnological materials, any state party may call upon other states parties to make joint efforts to take the necessary measures, including the control of imports.⁴³ States parties to the UNESCO Convention must respect the cultural heritage within the territories for the international relations of which they are responsible, and must take all appropriate measures to prohibit and prevent the illicit import of cultural property in such territories.⁴⁴ Finally, states parties undertake, consistent with their laws, to prevent transfers of ownership of cultural property likely to promote the illicit import of such property by all appropriate means.⁴⁵ Although the UNESCO Convention imposes some requirements on states parties in relation to the import of cultural property, it is far from constituting a comprehensive binding import regulation.

The UNIDROIT Convention does not provide for specific import regulations. Instead, it lays down a set of rules for the return of illegally exported cultural objects. Even if this Convention orders the return of

⁴⁰ UNESCO Convention, Art 3.

⁴¹ *ibid*, Art 7b(i).

⁴² *ibid*, Art 7b(ii).

⁴³ *ibid*, Art 9.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, Art 12.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, Art 13(a).

stolen and certain illegally exported cultural objects by their possessor and thereby encourages buyers to act carefully when acquiring and in the given case importing cultural objects, it does not establish any substantive or procedural rule on the introduction of cultural objects from one state to another. The words 'import' and 'importation' do not even appear in the text of the UNIDROIT Convention.

As far as regional-level cultural property protection regulation is concerned, the EU does not stand alone. The San Salvador Convention, adopted in the framework of the OAS, prohibits the importation of cultural property protected by the convention, unless the state owning it authorises its exportation for purposes of promoting knowledge of national cultures.⁴⁶ Additionally, the convention declares that states parties may resort to any measure they consider effective to prevent and curb the unlawful importation of cultural property, as well as measures necessary for the return of such property to the state to which it belongs in the event of its removal.⁴⁷

It must be mentioned that the more recent Nicosia Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property adopted under the aegis of the Council of Europe, which has not yet entered into force, contains an article on illegal importation. This requires states parties to qualify the intentional importation of movable cultural property as a criminal offence if it constitutes a breach of domestic legislation on the grounds that the cultural property had been stolen, excavated or exported in violation of the law of another state and to impose criminal sanctions in such a case.⁴⁸ This article is, however, subject to reservation. Knowingly acquiring and placing illegally imported cultural property on the market must also be considered a criminal offence.⁴⁹ More generally, the Nicosia Convention also requires states parties to 'introduce import and export control procedures, in accordance with the relevant international instruments, including a system whereby the importation and exportation of movable cultural property are subject to the issuance of specific certificates'.⁵⁰

Some EU Member States provide for restrictions on the import of cultural property from third countries and require a declaration of the import or the presentation of export documentation, while others do not specifically address the importation of cultural goods.⁵¹

Some legislations explicitly prohibit the import of illegally exported cultural goods, in accordance with the applicable international and EU

⁴⁶ San Salvador Convention, Art 3.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, Art 10.

⁴⁸ Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property, Nicosia, 19 May 2017, Art 5. See also Nicosia Convention, Art 6(2).

⁴⁹ Nicosia Convention, Arts 7–8.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, Art 20(b).

⁵¹ See European Commission, DG Taxud/Deloitte, *Fighting illicit trafficking in cultural goods: analysis of customs issues in the EU*, Final report, June 2017, 84–98.

instruments, without requiring an import licence. The German *Kulturschutzgesetz* prohibits the import of cultural goods if they are classified as national cultural goods by an EU Member State or a state party to the UNESCO Convention and if they were taken from the territory of such a state in violation of legal provisions on the protection of national cultural goods; if they were removed in breach of an EU regulation; or if they were taken contrary to the First Protocol of the 1954 Hague Convention.⁵² The importer has to demonstrate that export from the country of origin was legal by presenting an export licence or other confirmation by the country of origin.⁵³ Similarly, Austrian legislation prohibits the importation of cultural goods illegally exported from an EU Member State or a state party to the UNESCO Convention if their removal would also be illegal at the time of importation to Austria.⁵⁴ Greece requires a declaration by the importer and that the cultural goods concerned are subject to inspection as far as their origin is concerned.⁵⁵ In Italy, upon the transport or import of cultural goods from EU Member States and third countries respectively, at the importer's request, a certificate is issued on the basis of documentation that is appropriate to identify the goods and to prove the origin of the goods from the territory of the Member State or the third country from which they were transported or imported.⁵⁶ It must be noted, however, that even in Member States regulating import, the subject matter scope of application of import restrictions, ie the objects covered, differ.

Countries outside the EU have also adopted specific import regulations related to cultural property. The US and Switzerland, two states parties to the UNESCO Convention, make the imposition of import restrictions conditional upon an international agreement with the source country. The US implemented the UNESCO Convention by means of the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (CPIA), which addresses import restrictions, too.⁵⁷ By virtue of the CPIA, import restrictions may not be imposed generally on the importation of cultural property, but only regarding archaeological or ethnological material.⁵⁸ The CPIA covers only objects of archaeological interest with a minimum age limit of 250 years.⁵⁹ The CPIA authorises the US president to conclude international agreements with other states parties to the UNESCO Convention with the aim of restricting the import to the US of archaeological or eth-

⁵² Kulturgutschutzgesetz vom 31. Juli 2016 (BGBl I S 1914), § 28.

⁵³ Kulturschutzgesetz, § 30.

⁵⁴ Bundesgesetz über die Rückgabe unrechtmäßig verbrachter Kulturgüter, BGBl I Nr 19/2016, § 4.

⁵⁵ Law No 3028/2002 on the protection of antiquities and cultural heritage in general; Sarapani (n 22) 218–222.

⁵⁶ Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio, Art 72.

⁵⁷ Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (CPIA) 19 USC §§ 2601–13. Patty Gerstenblith, 'The Legal Framework for the Prosecution of Crimes Involving Archaeological Objects' (2016) 64 United States Attorney's Bulletin 5, 9–13.

⁵⁸ Gerstenblith (n 57) 10.

⁵⁹ 19 USC § 2601(2)(C)(i)(II).

nological material from the other state.⁶⁰ If the US president determines that an emergency condition applies with respect to any archaeological or ethnological material of any state party, the president may apply import restrictions to such material, even in the absence of a bilateral agreement.⁶¹ The designated archaeological or ethnological material can only be imported to the US if certificates demonstrate that export from the other state party was legal. More specifically, the 1972 Pre-Columbian Act also prohibits the importation of listed pre-Columbian monumental or architectural sculptures and murals without an export certificate from the country of origin.⁶²

Under the Swiss *Kulturgütertransfersgesetz*,⁶³ import restrictions apply to cultural goods when they are provided for by an international agreement concluded between Switzerland and another UNESCO Convention state party. Such an international agreement can be entered into provided that the object of the agreement is a cultural object of crucial significance for the cultural heritage of the contracting state concerned; the cultural object is subject to export provisions on the protection of cultural heritage of the contracting state concerned; and reciprocity is ensured.⁶⁴ In order to prevent from further damage another state's cultural heritage that is endangered due to extraordinary circumstances, importation can either be permitted, made subject to conditions, or restricted or prohibited for a determined period of time.⁶⁵ An action for the return of illegally imported cultural goods may be brought by the state from which the cultural goods were illegally exported under the *Kulturgütertransfersgesetz*, provided that the claimant state demonstrates that the cultural goods have crucial significance for its cultural heritage and were illegally imported.⁶⁶ The state claim for return may be initiated within one year from the date when the authorities of the claimant state became aware of the location of the cultural goods and of the person who possesses them but at the latest within 30 years of the illegal exportation of the cultural goods.⁶⁷ However, a good faith possessor is entitled to compensation, to be paid by the claiming state, in the event of return.⁶⁸ It must be noted that although the US and Swiss laws specify rules on importation and address the consequences of illegal import, a strong freezing effect was not demonstrated on the US and Swiss art markets due to the operation of these rules.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, § 2602.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, § 2603.

⁶² *ibid.*, § 2091.

⁶³ Bundesgesetz über den internationalen Kulturgütertransfer (*Kulturgütertransfersgesetz*, KGTG) vom 20. Juni 2003.

⁶⁴ *Kulturgütertransfersgesetz*, Art 7.

⁶⁵ *Kulturgütertransfersgesetz*, Art 8.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, Art 9(1).

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, Art 9(4).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, Art 9(5)-(6).

It is to be noted that certain national laws are not limited to establishing public law rules on the import of cultural property, but also address the private law effects of illegal importation. In this sense, they go clearly beyond the EU Import Regulation. Some impose an obligation on market actors not to place illegally imported cultural goods on the market or transfer such property, and the breach of this obligation results in the nullity of the underlying contracts.⁶⁹ The Swiss *Kulturgütertransfersgesetz* even imposes an obligation on persons active in the art trade and auction business to provide information to their customers regarding the import and export regulations of states parties to the 1970 UNESCO Convention.⁷⁰

5.2 The EU Import Regulation and the existing EU cultural property protection regime

Even at the EU level, the EU Import Regulation is not without precedent and its solutions fit very well with the already existing EU legal provisions on the protection of cultural goods.

First, Articles 28-30 and 34-36 TFEU,⁷¹ as well as Directive 2014/60/EU,⁷² addressed intra-EU trade, while Regulation 116/2009/EC (EU Export Regulation) deals with the export of cultural goods from the EU.⁷³ The fact that the cultural goods of EU Member States were already protected by the EU Export Regulation and Directive 2014/60/EU is why the EU Import Regulation does not apply to cultural goods created or discovered in the territory of the EU.⁷⁴ Although the specific cultural property legislation of the EU did not previously address the import of cultural property from third countries in a comprehensive way, two regulations were adopted, which also introduced import restrictions, to protect cultural property originating from Iraq and Syria. Regulation 1210/2003/EC concerning certain specific restrictions on economic and financial relations with Iraq (Iraqi Sanctions Regulation)⁷⁵ and Regulation 36/2012/EU concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria (Syri-

⁶⁹ See in Germany: Kulturgutschutzgesetz, § 40, and in Switzerland: Kulturgütertransfersgesetz, Art 16.

⁷⁰ Kulturgütertransfersgesetz, Art 16(2)(b).

⁷¹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [2012] OJ C326/47.

⁷² Directive 2014/60/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 (Recast) [2014] OJ L159/1.

⁷³ Council Regulation (EC) No 116/2009 of 18 December 2008 on the export of cultural goods [2009] OJ L39/1.

⁷⁴ EU Import Regulation, Art 1(2).

⁷⁵ Council Regulation (EC) No 1210/2003 of 7 July 2003 concerning certain specific restrictions on economic and financial relations with Iraq and repealing Regulation (EC) No 2465/96 [2003] OJ L169/6.

an Sanctions Regulation)⁷⁶ already introduced import restrictions regarding cultural property originating from Iraq and Syria. Although these regulations are not specific cultural property regulations, they contain rules on its protection. As they are part of sanctions regimes, they are applied temporarily, while the sanctions regulations concerned remain applicable. The import of or introduction to the territory of the EU, as well as dealing in Iraqi cultural property illegally removed from Iraq, is prohibited by the Iraqi Sanctions Regulation. Similarly, the import of and the provision of brokering services related to Syrian cultural property are prohibited by the Syrian Sanctions Regulation, where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the goods have been removed from Syria without the consent of their legitimate owner or have been removed in breach of Syrian law or international law. The Iraqi and Syrian Sanctions Regulations cover objects listed in their annexes. The list of these objects corresponds to the list contained in Annex I of the EU Export Regulation. Unlike the EU Import Regulation, the Iraqi and the Syrian Sanctions Regulations do not apply a reversed burden of proof.⁷⁷ It is for the authorities of the Member States to establish that the cultural goods originate from Iraq or Syria.⁷⁸ Cultural objects have been seized under the two regulations in only a few cases.⁷⁹

Second, the language of the EU Import Regulation is not new. The Iraqi Sanctions Regulation uses the notions of 'cultural property' and 'cultural items'; the Syrian Sanctions Regulation refers to 'cultural property goods'; Directive 2014/60/EU makes reference to 'cultural objects'; the EU Export Regulation refers to 'cultural goods' as the subject matter of the regulation and the EU Import Regulation does the same. Although the terminology of EU law is not entirely consistent, the use of the concept of 'cultural goods' in the EU Export and Import Regulations suggests that although culture is not in the competence of the EU, trade in works of art involves 'goods' that trigger the application of the provisions on free movement of goods within the EU and the rules of the common commercial policy in relation to third countries.

Third, the way of determining the material scope of application of the EU Import Regulation and, more specifically, the cultural goods covered, does not differ substantially. The previous EU regulations used a similar technique: the listing of cultural goods in an annex, taking their age and a financial threshold into account. The minimum 250 years age limit for cultural goods subject to an import licence corresponds to the criterion

⁷⁶ Council Regulation (EU) No 36/2012 of 18 January 2012 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria and repealing Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 [2012] OJ L16/1.

⁷⁷ European Commission, DG Taxud/Deloitte, *Fighting illicit trafficking in cultural goods: analysis of customs issues in the EU* (n 51) 104.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 100–102.

applied by the US CPIA.⁸⁰ Although there are overlaps in the cultural goods falling under the scope of application of the EU Export and EU Import Regulation, their lists are not fully identical.⁸¹ The cultural goods listed in the EU Import Regulation correspond instead to the list of the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the UNIDROIT Convention.

Fourth, the legal basis of the EU Import Regulation is Article 207(2) TFEU, ie the commercial policy competence. The same legal basis was used for the EU Export Regulation, the relatively laconic recital of which simply states that common rules on trade with third countries are necessary for the protection of cultural goods, and for the maintenance of the internal market.⁸² At the same time, in Article 114 TFEU, the internal market legal basis was relied on regarding Directive 2014/60/EU. The selection of treaty articles that constitute a legal basis for regulating extra- or intra-EU commerce may indicate that the international art trade is considered a commercial issue, although it can also be explained by the fact that the EU has only supporting competence in the field of culture.⁸³

Taking all the above into account, one could even draw the conclusion that the EU Import Regulation uses previously existing concepts, regulatory techniques and policy approach. However, this is not entirely the case. This is because the EU Import Regulation brings certain major changes, both at the level of the rules and in its regulatory approach.

6 The addition of rules of the EU Import Regulation

Why can it be said that that the new EU Import Regulation is more than a restatement of pre-existing international or domestic cultural property import regimes? First of all, importers could profit from the divergence of legal systems. The differences between the import regimes of the Member States can result in the avoidance of the stricter import legislation of some Member States and can direct the flow of the art trade to those Member States with no or more lenient import rules, giving rise to 'port-shopping'. Once the cultural goods are in the territory of a Member State, they can benefit from the free movement of goods within the EU internal market. A clear addition of the EU Import Regulation is that it levels off the differences between national rules on importing cultural goods, providing uniform rules and preventing 'port shopping'.

As is well known, the application of the UNESCO Convention is dependent on implementation by the states parties. Of the Member States of the EU, two, Ireland and Malta, did not even ratify the UNESCO Convention and those that are parties to the UNESCO Convention have im-

⁸⁰ European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document, Impact Assessment Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the import of cultural goods, Brussels, SWD(2017) 262 final, 27.

⁸¹ Urbinati (n 6) 61.

⁸² EU Export Regulation, Recital (2).

⁸³ Art 6(c) TFEU.

plemented it in different ways. Previously, importing cultural goods to the territory of the Member States belonged to the competence of individual Member States, which left room for divergent regulations.⁸⁴

In comparison to the UNESCO Convention, the scope of application of the EU Import Regulation is broader. It covers not only the treatment of cultural goods exported from states parties to the UNESCO Convention, but also from any other state. The EU Import Regulation overcomes a twofold problem to a large extent. On the one hand, the export restrictions of the source countries are very often not respected outside their territories and become simply unenforceable. The EU Import Regulation recognises the export legislation of any state and sanctions its violation. Furthermore, the regime of import licences and importer statements is founded on the recognition of the export legislation of the source country. As importation presupposes the existence of an export licence or export documentation from the country where the cultural goods were created or discovered, the EU approach also involves the recognition of such documents. One of the pillars of the EU cultural property protection regime has been mutual trust between the Member States.⁸⁵ The EU Import Regulation unilaterally puts trust in third countries, more precisely in the export legislation of third countries and their authorities issuing export certificates and other documents. On the other hand, the UNESCO Convention had already been criticised for providing blanket rules for state parties to designate broadly protected cultural property and restrict its export, and forcing other states to recognise and enforce those foreign export restrictions.⁸⁶ The same has been repeated in relation to the EU Import Regulation and it also stressed that it is done without reciprocity in the relationship with third countries.⁸⁷ However, it is to be noted that, under the EU regime, only the import of cultural goods specified by the EU Import Regulation is subject to restrictions, not all goods that were perhaps arbitrarily designated by the source country for protection.

A shortcoming of the international regimes is that they rely on state consent and implementation that sometimes fails or is incomplete.⁸⁸ The EU Import Regulation is directly applicable in the Member States and as such it gives less room to manoeuvre to the Member States. Some flexibility is recognised, for instance regarding the measures to be taken by national authorities when cultural goods are intended to be introduced illegally⁸⁹ and the penalties to be imposed in the event of the breach of the

⁸⁴ See EU Import Regulation, Recital (4).

⁸⁵ See Directive 2014/60/EU, Recital (10); Michele Graziadei and Barbara Pasa, 'Patrimoni culturali, tesori nazionali: il protezionismo degli Stati membri dell'UE nella circolazione dei beni culturali' (2017) 22 *Contratto impresa/Europa* 121, 131.

⁸⁶ Merryman, 'Two Ways of Thinking About Cultural Property' (n 15) 844-845.

⁸⁷ Valentin and Rogers (n 10).

⁸⁸ See MacKenzie-Gray Scott (n 3) 229.

⁸⁹ EU Import Regulation, Art 3(1).

rules of the EU Import Regulation.⁹⁰ This does not alter, however, the aim of the new rules, to ensure that the ‘imports of cultural goods are subject to uniform controls’ in the EU.⁹¹

7 A paradigm shift in EU cultural property legislation?

It can be argued that the EU Import Regulation does not simply introduce various new elements in regulating the import of cultural property, but heralds a new age for EU cultural property legislation. A deeper analysis of the EU Import Regulation may allow the conclusion that a paradigm shift, or at least a significant policy change, is taking place in EU cultural property law.

The justification of the Regulation already suggests a policy change. As set out above, the commercial policy competence was selected as a legal basis by the EU legislature. The choice of the legal basis and the explanation of the need for the EU Import Regulation in the recitals are not entirely in line with each other. This discrepancy already indicates a slight policy shift. The overall objective of the EU has been to create an internal market, free from the illicit trafficking of cultural objects. However, quite interestingly, the very first recital of the EU Import Regulation does not deal much with the significance of the new regulation for the art trade or common commercial interests, but underlines its importance from the point of view of preventing the financing of terrorism and related money laundering. Instead of a commerce-centred approach, the Regulation makes clear that it ‘should take into account regional and local characteristics of peoples and territories, rather than the market value of cultural goods’.⁹² It is also interesting to note that Article 3(7) of the EU Import Regulation acknowledges that the restrictions introduced by the Regulation (import licence and importer statement) do not affect other measures adopted by the EU in accordance with Article 215 TFEU. Article 215 provides a legal basis for imposing economic sanctions by the EU against natural or legal persons and groups or non-state entities. The reference reveals that similar trade restricting measures could be adopted under Article 215 TFEU, a legal basis upon which counterterrorist measures may also be rested. It is no coincidence that the same legal basis was used by the Iraqi⁹³ and Syrian Sanctions Regulations.

It is telling that the proposal for the EU Import Regulation was put forward in the framework of the Commission Action Plan for Strengthening the Fight against Terrorist Financing. This approach can, however, be contrasted by reports – mainly relied on by art dealer representatives

⁹⁰ *ibid*, Art 11.

⁹¹ *ibid*, Recital (4).

⁹² EU Import Regulation, Recital (2).

⁹³ The Iraqi Sanctions Regulation refers to Articles 60 and 301 of the EC Treaty, Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and of the Treaty establishing the European Community [2002] OJ C325/1.

– that no evidence may be found for significant illegal art trade generated by terrorist organisations and thereby for money-laundering and financing terrorism.⁹⁴ Indeed, a report ordered by the European Commission refers to terrorist financing as an effect of trafficking in cultural goods mentioned in the literature.⁹⁵ At the same time, the report acknowledges that ‘hard evidence on the existence of these effects is currently often lacking’ and the survey conducted does not demonstrate any available evidence of the financing of terrorist activities related to the illicit art trade.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the approach of the EU is not self-standing. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) took, as a point of departure in its Resolution 2199(2015), ‘that ISIL, ANF and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida, are generating income from engaging directly or indirectly in the looting and smuggling of cultural heritage items from archaeological sites, museums, libraries, archives, and other sites in Iraq and Syria, which is being used to support their recruitment efforts and strengthen their operational capability to organize and carry out terrorist attacks’⁹⁷ and then it required the UN member states to take appropriate measures to prevent the trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property.⁹⁸ The need for taking measures by UN member states to fight against the illicit trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property was also confirmed by UNSC Resolution 2253(2015).⁹⁹ The UNSC adopted Resolution 2347(2017), in which it requested UN member states to take appropriate steps to prevent and counter the illicit trade and trafficking in cultural property originating from a context of armed conflict, notably from terrorist groups, including by prohibiting cross-border trade in such illicit items where States have a reasonable suspicion that the items originate from such a context, and which lack clearly documented and certified provenance, thereby allowing for their eventual safe return.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, it called upon UN members to co-operate in investigations, prosecutions, seizure and confiscation, as well as the return, restitution or repatriation of illicitly exported or imported cultural property.¹⁰¹ Similarly, it urged UN member states, in order to prevent and counter trafficking in cultural property illegally appropriated and exported in the context of armed conflicts, notably by terrorist

⁹⁴ Fitz Gibbon (n 9); see also Kristin Hausler, ‘The EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in Conflict and Crisis: An Elephant in the Room?’ (2021) 7 *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 193, 197.

⁹⁵ European Commission (n 51) 120; Macquisten (n 12).

⁹⁶ European Commission (n 51) 120.

⁹⁷ UNSC Resolution 2199 (2015) S/RES/2199 (2015), para 16.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, para 17.

⁹⁹ UNSC Resolution 2253 (2015) S/RES/2253 (2015).

¹⁰⁰ UNSC Resolution 2347 (2017), S/RES/2347 (2017), para 8. See Hans-Jakob Schindler and Frederique Gautier, ‘Looting and Smuggling of Artifacts as a Strategy to Finance Terrorism Global Sanctions as a Disruptive and Preventive Tool’ (2019) 26 *International Journal of Cultural Property* 331.

¹⁰¹ UNSC Resolution 2347 (2017), S/RES/2347 (2017), para 12.

groups, to adopt adequate and effective regulations on import.¹⁰² It may be noted that the Iraqi Sanctions Regulation explicitly refers to the relevant UNSC resolution.¹⁰³ The 2007 Taormina summit of the G7 stated that cultural 'property is a source of financing for activities of terrorist groups and organizations'.¹⁰⁴ The World Customs Organization adopted a resolution on the role of customs in preventing the illicit trafficking of cultural objects. The measures considered by the resolution were partly justified by the existence of 'linkages between illicit trafficking in cultural objects, money laundering, other criminal activities and possibly terrorism'.¹⁰⁵ Embedded in such developments, the reference to the prevention of financing terrorism and money-laundering in the EU Import Regulation demonstrates the global focus of the EU cultural property protection regime.

The UNESCO Convention and the approach of the 1970s and 1980s were considered by Merryman as the age of cultural nationalism, since countries focused only on safeguarding their cultural property located in or originating from their own territories and hindering the international art trade with a broad application of export restrictions.¹⁰⁶ At a regional level, however, the EU seems to follow a different path.

A clear policy change may be noticed regarding the EU cultural property legislation. For a long time, EU law focused primarily on the protection of the national treasures of the Member States in accordance with Article 36 TFEU and safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage as indicated in Article 3(3) TEU. Similarly, Article 167 TFEU mentions the common cultural heritage and cultural heritage of European significance, in addition to the need to respect national and regional differences. As to the trade with third countries, EU cultural property legislation has addressed the export of cultural goods from the EU. This approach simply gave cultural nationalism a broader regional dimension.

This approach was changed first by the Iraqi and Syrian Sanctions Regulations. The Iraqi Sanctions Regulation and the Syrian Sanctions Regulation undoubtedly brought a change in EU policy towards cultural property. First of all, they were the first EU measures introducing import restrictions related to cultural property. Second, they went beyond the protection of the cultural heritage of EU Member States and extended the protection to cultural property originating from these two countries.

These characteristics of the two regulations are shared by the EU Import Regulation. The change initiated by the Iraqi and Syrian Sanc-

¹⁰² *ibid.*, para 17(b).

¹⁰³ UNSC Resolution 1483 (2003), S/RES/1483 (2003).

¹⁰⁴ G7 Taormina Statement on the Fight Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, para 12.

¹⁰⁵ Resolution of the Customs Co-operation Council on the role of customs in preventing illicit trafficking of cultural objects, Brussels, July 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Merryman, 'Two Ways of Thinking About Cultural Property' (n 15) 850; Merryman, 'Cultural Property Internationalism' (n 15) 22.

tions Regulations has thus been crowned by the EU Import Regulation. The sanction measures covered cultural goods from these two states, but not from other countries equally afflicted by war or an unstable political situation.¹⁰⁷ The extension of the territorial scope of the protection is crucial, because the application of the *ad hoc* sanctions regulations could be circumvented by falsifying the origin of the cultural goods.¹⁰⁸ The traffic in and importation of artefacts from Syria and Iraq to the EU was possible by falsely claiming that the objects originated in other countries, such as Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon.¹⁰⁹

The EU Import Regulation generalises the protection of cultural goods without specifying the countries of origin concerned to the extent that the country of origin accords protection regarding the export of the cultural goods. As such, the EU Import Regulation protects the cultural heritage of all countries of the world. An introverted regional perspective opened up gradually and turned into a global point of view guarding the protection of cultural heritage. The change in the approach of legal regulation is completed by further EU actions that promote the protection of the cultural heritage in third countries. In particular, the EU lent funding in cooperation with UNESCO to projects for safeguarding the cultural heritage in third countries, such as Mali and Ethiopia.¹¹⁰

Where can the EU cultural property protection regime – now completed by the EU Import Regulation – be located in the spectrum of cultural nationalism and cultural internationalism?

As we saw earlier, the soundness of the traditional paradigms elaborated by Merryman in the 1980s has been called into question in the legal literature. The EU Import Regulation clearly goes beyond the approach of cultural nationalism, since its aspiration is not simply the protection of the cultural objects of the EU Member States. With its legislative act, the EU also wants to safeguard cultural goods originating from outside the EU. At the same time, the EU Import Regulation does not correspond to the internationalist idea of the freest possible trade in cultural objects either. Introducing import restrictions, paying heed to the export restrictions of other countries, squarely implies an assumption that limitations to their free trade are necessary to safeguard the cultural heritage.

Instead, the EU Import Regulation transcends the commonly accepted binarity of cultural nationalism and internationalism. It takes over certain elements from both. The EU legislative approach has an internationalist vision, to the extent it aims at not only the protection of the cultural goods of the EU Member States, but also those of third countries.

¹⁰⁷ European Commission (n 51) 104.

¹⁰⁸ Sarapani (n 22) 208.

¹⁰⁹ See Neil Brodie, 'Syria and Its Regional Neighbors: A Case of Cultural Property Protection Policy Failure?' (2015) 22 *International Journal of Cultural Property* 317, 323.

¹¹⁰ European Commission, Mapping of Cultural Heritage actions in European Union policies, programmes and activities (August 2017) 38.

The goods covered by the EU Import and Export Regulation to a large extent overlap. The EU Export Regulation not only protects cultural goods of the Member States, but its protection extends equally to cultural goods from third countries in free circulation in the EU that are intended to be exported. By nature, the EU Import Regulation aims at protecting foreign cultural goods. The completed regime is protective both towards the cultural goods of the Member States as well as those of third countries treating cultural goods as part of the common cultural heritage. This gives rise to a symmetry in the protection of cultural heritage, irrespective of whether it originates from the EU or from a third country. The EU regime clearly represents a paradigm shift, from cultural nationalism towards a balanced vision that avoids the self-centredness of cultural nationalism. At the same time, it does not ignore the need for regulation to safeguard cultural heritage by imposing certain restraints on the art trade, and the import restrictions are to a large extent determined with due regard to the export legislation of the states where the cultural objects appearing in the trade were created or discovered.

8 Conclusions

The EU cultural property protection regime, which previously focused on cultural goods originating from the EU Member States and which elevated cultural nationalism to a regional level, is now completed by the EU Import Regulation. With the EU Import Regulation, the EU legislature continues to acknowledge the need for a regulated art trade and imposes certain obligations on importers, including the requirement to obtain an import licence or for an importer statement, depending on the characteristics of the cultural goods. The rules and regulatory techniques of the new regulation are, however, not entirely new. Import restrictions are not unknown in the world of the art trade. Instead, the peculiarity of the EU cultural property legislation is that, following a global vision, it provides equal and symmetric protection for cultural goods originating from the EU and for those from third countries, thanks to the introduction of the EU Import Regulation enshrining the common cultural heritage, irrespective of its origin. In this way, the EU legislature seems to pursue an approach that transcends the extremes of both cultural nationalism and cultural internationalism.



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REGULATING DIGITAL PLATFORMS: WILL THE DSA CORRECT ITS PREDECESSOR'S DEFICIENCIES?*

Berrak Genç-Gelgeç**

Abstract: The E-Commerce Directive 2000/31 (ECD) has been the law applicable to Internet intermediaries related to their liability for third-party content on their platform, electronic contracts, and e-commerce activities for more than twenty years. Its core is the harmonised immunity regime established in Articles 12–15. These rules grant immunity to the providers of mere conduit, caching, and hosting from liability arising from infringing content made available by their users on their platform. However, the ECD has been criticised for not fully achieving its objective of uniformity, not keeping up with the pace of the Internet, and not effectively protecting the parties' fundamental rights as it gives crucial discretion to the intermediaries. The ECD is to be replaced with the Digital Services Act (DSA). The aim is to regulate new means of digital services (especially Big Tech) while benefiting from their 'technical and operational ability to act against specific items of illegal content' in preventing the availability of illegal content and protecting fundamental rights. Its framework is based on the prevailing idea of acknowledging digital platforms as responsible actors. It establishes new sets of tiered due-diligence obligations for digital platforms to comply with while reproducing the immunity regime of the ECD. Its framework appears to target those issues arising from the ECD. However, whether it can deliver this promise calls for discussion. This paper aims to address this question. To do so, it will first try to identify the deficits of the ECD. Second, and more importantly, it will seek to scrutinise the DSA to evaluate if it provides the answers to the issues that the ECD fell short of.

Keywords: digital platforms, liability, immunity regime, E-Commerce Directive, Digital Services Act.

* This paper considers the consolidated version of the DSA that was adopted on 5 July 2022.

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1 Introduction

The Digital Services Act (DSA),¹ proposed by the European Commission to update the rules on information society services in December 2020, was approved by the European Parliament in July 2022 following a legislation process. It will be in force once it is approved and published by the Council of the European Union (EU). It will then be applicable from either 15 months after that date or on 1 January 2024, whichever is the later.² This means that the E-Commerce Directive 2000/31 (ECD)³ is to be replaced by the DSA at that time.

The ECD has been the applicable law regulating Internet intermediaries⁴ since 2000. Intermediaries are the pillars of the Internet, as they 'bring together or facilitate transactions between third parties on the Internet'.⁵ The ECD's main objective was to create a legal framework to facilitate the free movement of intermediaries within the EU so that innovation and e-commerce activities can also be encouraged. Arguably, the most effective way to do the latter is to establish rules enabling intermediaries to provide services easily and foster innovation.⁶ Similarly, the European legislator's approach to the ECD was not to regulate intermediaries through hard law but to establish rules to tackle illegal content online without imposing strict duties. Henceforth, the immunity regime is established by Articles 12–15 ECD. These rules exempt intermediaries from liability for the illegal content made available on their platforms by third parties.

Information society services cover 'all services normally provided against remuneration, at a distance by electronic means and on the indi-

¹ European Parliament legislative resolution of 5 July 2022 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (COM(2020)0825 – C9-0418/2020 – 2020/0361(COD)) (DSA).

² DSA, Art 74.

³ Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market (Directive on electronic commerce) [2000] OJ L178/1 (ECD).

⁴ This term is used interchangeably with information society services in this article.

⁵ OECD, 'OECD Report on the Economic and the Social Role of Internet Intermediaries' (April 2010) <<http://www.oecd.org/internet/ieconomy/44949023.pdf>> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁶ Indeed, in the early 2000s, this was the preferred approach to regulating intermediaries. Under US law, liability exemptions are also provided to specific service providers, although vertically. S.230(c) of the Communications Decency Act exempts access providers from liability for any content and hosting providers for information they store (excluding IP rights), while s.512 of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act grants immunity for access providers, caching services, hosting services and linking services arising from copyright infringements. Luciano Floridi, 'The End of an Era: From Self-Regulation to Hard Law for the Digital Industry' (2021) 34 *Philosophy & Technology* 619–622; Giancarlo Frosio, 'Regulatory Shift in State Intervention: From Intermediary Liability to Responsibility' in Edoardo Celeste, Amélie Heldt and Clara Iglesias Keller (eds), *Constitutionalising Social Media* (Hart Publishing, forthcoming) pt 3.

vidual request of a service receiver'.⁷ However, immunity is only granted for certain services of intermediaries. These services are specified as the transmission of information ('mere conduit'), the provision of automatic, intermediate, and temporary storage ('caching'), and storage of information in the capacity of the host ('hosting'). Having immunity granted, however, depends on fulfilling different conditions for different types of intermediaries. For mere conduit and caching intermediaries, not being involved in the transmission of illegal content or information would be sufficient to have immunity granted, as the provision of these services does not necessarily require any intervention or involvement on their side. On the other hand, hosting intermediaries are required to take swift action once they become aware (for claims regarding damages) or have actual knowledge (for criminal law matters) of the infringing nature of the content uploaded on their platform to benefit from immunity. As hosting intermediaries store information on their platforms, which might require involvement from intermediaries in operating, the immunity is grounded on different conditions from mere conduit and caching intermediaries. In this respect, the ECD encourages hosting intermediaries to implement the notice and takedown (NTD) mechanism in their systems to tackle infringing content. But further insight on how the mechanism should work and what principles should be followed is not provided. These matters are left to Member States to deal with under national laws. That being said, Article 15 ECD prohibits Member States from imposing general monitoring obligations on intermediaries in tackling illegal content. In this way, this article confines hosting intermediaries' involvement in acting against illegal content, although the term 'scope of general monitoring' is not clearly defined, as will be demonstrated later.

The immunity rules apply horizontally so that they apply to cases when the uploaded content gives rise to an infringement of any substantive rights, with only the exception of claims relating to data and privacy protection.⁸ More importantly, the immunity rules provide additional protection to intermediaries. This means that not fulfilling the conditions for immunity, ie failing to benefit from immunity, does not automatically lead an intermediary to be regarded as liable.⁹ The intermediaries' liability question is dealt with by the national laws of Member States. This is compatible with the approach adopted for the ECD, as well as the fact that tort law (which often applies to civil liability cases) is not harmonised

⁷ ECD, recital 17.

⁸ ECD, Art 5(b).

⁹ Eifert and others state that the immunity rules should not be considered as rules to provide privileges to intermediaries. The regime instead specifies the general duty of care of intermediaries from illegal content. The DSA's approach of reproducing the immunity regime is thus regarded as appropriate, provided that intermediaries are granted exemption from liability when they are not involved in their users' infringing activity. Martin Eifert, Axel Metzger, Heike Schweitzer and Gerhard Wagner, 'Taming the Giants: The DMA/DSA Package' (2021) 58 *Common Market Law Review* 987, 1005–1006.

within the EU.¹⁰

Having said that, the DSA is grounded on a somewhat different approach. It reflects the prevailing idea of acknowledging digital platforms as responsible actors in tackling illegal content.¹¹ Although the ECD's immunity regime is maintained in the DSA with a small addition, new sets of transparency, accountability and information obligations are imposed on providers of digital services, where some of these obligations appear as ex-ante ones. Considering the evolution of the Internet since the ECD was adopted, acknowledging intermediaries as main actors and imposing duties on them seem more appropriate for establishing a properly functioning digital market. When the Internet was in its infancy, the aim was to foster innovation with the ECD, but now innovative digital services have been taken to a different level. Especially with the advent of Web 2.0,¹² users have become more actively involved in the Internet, while intermediaries' societal, economic and political impact scales up accordingly.¹³ This also means that the harm caused by illegal content affects more users.¹⁴ In dealing with this, the ECD, as mentioned, requires hosting intermediaries to act against illegal content and accordingly encourages them to implement NTD mechanisms. It, however, does not determine the scope of the actions or the measures that could be taken. In default of

¹⁰ Helmut Koziol, 'Harmonising Tort Law in the European Union: Advantages and Difficulties' (2013) 1 ELTE Law Journal 73–88; Michael Faure, 'The Harmonisation of EU Tort Law: A Law and Economics Analysis' in Paula Giliker (ed), *Research Handbook on EU Tort Law* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2017). There is also an EU plan to establish a legal framework for AI technologies. One of the legal initiatives proposed as part of that plan is to create civil liability rules for AI. For this action plan, see 'A European Approach to Artificial Intelligence' (European Commission, 28 September 2022) <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/european-approach-artificial-intelligence>> accessed 10 September 2022. See also Bernhard A Koch and others, 'Response of the European Law Institute to the Public Consultation on Civil Liability: Adapting Liability Rules to the Digital Age and Artificial Intelligence' (2022) 13 Journal of European Tort Law 25; European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Ernst Karner, Bernhard Koch and Mark Geistfeld, *Comparative Law Study on Civil Liability for Artificial Intelligence* (Publications Office of the European Union 2021); Alberto Galasso and Hong Luo, 'Punishing Robots: Issues in the Economics of Tort Liability and Innovation in Artificial Intelligence' in Ajay Agrawal, Joshua Gans and Avi Goldfarb (eds), *The Economics of Artificial Intelligence: An Agenda* (University of Chicago Press 2019) 493–504.

¹¹ Frosio (n 6). Floridi asserts that regulating digital platforms through soft law or self-regulation was also the most logical approach to facilitate the dialogue between society and the digital industry, although he now strongly supports regulating the digital market through hard law. See Floridi (n 6) 619 and 622.

¹² Web 2.0 is the technology which allows user interaction online via interactive applications and platforms. For a detailed analysis, see Tim O'Reilly, 'What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software' (2007) 65 International Journal of Digital Economics 17.

¹³ Ilaria Buri and Joris van Hoboken, 'The Digital Services Act (DSA) Proposal: A Critical Overview' (2021) Discussion paper, Digital Services Act (DSA) Observatory, Institute for Information Law (IVIIR), University of Amsterdam.

¹⁴ Alexandre De Streel and Martin Husovec, 'The E-commerce Directive as the Cornerstone of the Internal Market', study for the committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies (European Parliament, Luxembourg 2020) 25.

clearly defined rules and transparency obligations,¹⁵ the intermediaries can be said to become private powers.¹⁶ This is perhaps one of the ECD's greatest challenges in reaching its goal of establishing uniform rules.

The DSA, on the other hand, promisingly sets out due diligence obligations of transparency, accountability and information for digital services to qualify. More importantly, it takes the technical abilities, sizes and powers of digital services into account in establishing the rules. The obligations are set out depending on their size and roles in the online world. In this respect, the providers of digital services are classified into four categories: intermediaries, hosting intermediaries including online platforms, online platforms (providers of hosting services that also disseminate information),¹⁷ and very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines (VLOSEs) (online platforms that have more than 45 million recipients).¹⁸ As will be demonstrated later, each is required to perform duties at different levels. This approach seems effective in creating a uniformly applied legal framework, as it specifies each platform's obligations. Furthermore, the DSA reproduces the immunity regime for digital services. This also appears to be fit for purpose: regulating new means of digital services, especially Big Tech,¹⁹ while benefiting from their 'technical and operational ability to act against specific items of illegal content'²⁰ in preventing the availability of illegal content and pro-

¹⁵ Indeed, back in 2015, academics from around the world wrote an open letter directed at Google, seeking more transparency from Google, especially on the reasons for denying or granting delisting requests, as the Transparency Report published by Google was considered to lack the required clarity on these points. See Ellen P Goodman 'Open Letter to Google from 80 Internet Scholars: Release RTBF Compliance Data' (*Medium*, 13 May 2015) <<https://ellgood.medium.com/open-letter-to-google-from-80-internet-scholars-release-rtbf-compliance-data-cbfc6d59f1bd>> accessed 10 September 2022.

¹⁶ De Gregorio and Pollicino also state that '[...] immunizing or exempting these actors – Big Tech's predecessors – from third-party responsibility has contributed to the transformation of economic freedoms into something that resembles the exercise of powers as vested in public authorities' in Giovanni De Gregorio and Oreste Pollicino, 'The European Constitutional Road to Address Platform Power' in Heiko Richter, Marlene Straub and Erik Tuchtfield (eds), *To Break Up or Regulate Big Tech? Avenues to Constrain Private Power in the DSA/DMA Package* (2021) Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition Research Paper No 21-25, 16–21.

¹⁷ DSA, Art 2(h).

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ This is used for describing digital services, which are the major controllers of the digital market and have gained regulatory power over the market. It is associated with Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft. This is why the Digital Markets Act (Commission Proposal for a Regulation on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector (Digital Markets Act) COM(2020) 842 final) is also proposed by the legislators besides the DSA (as the second legislative initiative of the Digital Services Act package) and is aimed at providing a level playing field for all sizes of platforms and at protecting competition within the digital market by bringing new sets of rules for specific platforms (which are defined as gatekeepers) to comply with.

²⁰ DSA, recital 26.

tecting fundamental rights.²¹

Although the approach seems promising and effective, whether the framework established by the DSA will iron out the deficits of the ECD calls for discussion. This paper aims to address this question. To do so, it will first try to identify the deficiencies of the ECD. Second, and more importantly, it will seek to scrutinise the DSA to evaluate if it provides the answers for the issues the ECD has failed to address. It should, however, be underlined that the DSA's framework will not be discussed in its entirety; instead, it is to be addressed within the scope of the article's objective.

2 The ECD: where does it fall short?

The ECD establishes a legal framework for Internet intermediaries concerning their liability for illegal content made available on their platform, electronic contracts, or commercial communications. In tackling the liability question, as it is addressed, it sets out harmonised safe harbour rules for intermediaries in Articles 12–15. More precisely, it provides the rules governing the circumstances when an intermediary can be immune from the liability that may arise for third parties' illegal content made available on its platform. If an intermediary does not qualify for immunity, its liability is to be assessed by the courts of Member States as per their corresponding tort or penal liability laws. Hence, the existing regime is more appropriately described as an immunity regime rather than a liability regime.²² Before addressing the immunity regime, it should be noted that the ECD is adopted as a directive. This means that the ECD was not directly applied in Member States when it came into force. As a directive, the rules should be transposed into their national laws by the Member States. In doing so, the choice of forms and methods is left to the Member States. As will be seen, the choice of a directive affected the purpose of harmonisation in a negative way, especially regarding the NTD mechanism.

Reverting to immunity rules, immunity is provided for certain types of online services, namely the service that merely transmits information ('mere conduit'); that offers automatic, intermediate and temporary storage ('caching'); and that stores information in the capacity of a host ('hosting'). The regime, however, establishes different conditions according to the type of service provided since these services require a different

²¹ In contrast, Buri and van Hoboken argue that the imposition of accountability obligations might entrench the dominant position of the intermediaries, although the exact opposite is aimed at. See Ilaria Buri and Joris van Hoboken, 'The DSA Proposal's Impact on Digital Dominance' in Heiko Richter, Marlene Straub and Erik Tuchtfield (eds), *To Break Up or Regulate Big Tech? Avenues to Constrain Private Power in the DSA/DMA Package* (2021) Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition Research Paper No 21-25 10–15.

²² Patrick Van Eecke and Maarten Truyens, 'EU Study on the Legal Analysis of a Single Market for the Information Society' (2009) EU Study <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a856513e-ddd9-45e2-b3f1-6c9a0ea6c722>> Ch 6.3.2 accessed 10 September 2022.

operating process. These conditions assist in separating an active intermediary from one that remains passive while operating, as the ECD's approach in tackling illegal content is to foster innovation as well as to prevent the availability of infringing content online. Thus, immunity is provided to an intermediary that is regarded as passive. However, what should be understood by an active or passive intermediary is not clearly explained by the ECD. Recital 42 only states that the activity of an intermediary should be 'of a mere technical, automatic and passive nature which implies that the information society service provider has neither knowledge of nor control over the interested parties of deciding freely whether to adhere to the information which is transmitted or stored'.²³

In the *Google France* case,²⁴ the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) held that a hosting intermediary should play a neutral role when providing its service in order to benefit from immunity. This case considered third-party trademark infringements committed on Google's platform. One of the questions before the ECJ was whether or not Google (a referencing service provider that also enables advertisers to purchase keywords) qualifies as an information society service under the ECD. If it does, should it benefit from immunity?²⁵

In dealing with these questions, the ECJ held, in the light of recital 42, that a hosting provider should be neutral to be exempted from liability. It further established that it is considered to play a neutral role in offering its service when 'its conduct is merely technical, automatic and passive, pointing to a lack of knowledge or control of the data it stores'.²⁶ However, this test appears problematic as it would not always be straightforward to assess if a hosting intermediary's conduct is passive and purely technical. Hosting intermediaries would often need to have some tools implemented in their system to enable their users to use the services properly.

For example, an online auction site, eBay, optimises the presentation and sales on its platform through its advertisements on search engines,

²³ In that regard, recital 42 states the following: 'The exemptions from liability established in this Directive cover only cases where the activity of the information society service provider is limited to the technical process of operating and giving access to a communication network over which information made available by third parties is transmitted or temporarily stored, for the sole purpose of making the transmission more efficient; this activity is of a mere technical, automatic and passive nature, which implies that the information society service provider has neither knowledge of nor control over the interested parties of deciding freely whether to adhere to information which is transmitted or stored'.

²⁴ Joined Cases C-236/08 to C-238/08 *Google France SARL and Google Inc v Louis Vuitton Mallettier SA and Google France SARL v Viaticum SA and Lutecial SARL and Google France SARL v Centre national de recherche en relations humaines (CNRRH) SARL and Others* ECLI:EU:C:2010:159, paras 114–116.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

and assists users in enhancing their activities on its platform.²⁷ Such advertising-driven business models help the platforms attract more users and make them spend more time on these platforms.²⁸ The ECJ in *L'Oréal*²⁹ decided that eBay's role is passive unless the optimisation of presentation and sales through advertisements gives it knowledge of or control over the content. In this respect, it would not be wrong to conclude that hosting intermediaries would have some degree of involvement in providing their services.³⁰ Indeed, this was the ground on which the Advocate General (AG) in *L'Oréal*³¹ based his opinion when criticising the neutrality test that the ECJ in *Google France* applied. The ECJ, however, approved neutrality as a condition for hosting intermediaries' immunity in *L'Oréal* without discussing the points raised by the AG.³²

Later, in *YouTube v Cyando*,³³ the ECJ held, concerning the neutrality test, that the hosting provider's implementation of measures aimed at detecting illegal content on its platform should not be considered as giving an active role to the intermediary in conducting its service. This would mean that the hosting intermediary could and should (as per Article 14(1)(b)) implement necessary measures to tackle illegal content, but this ought not lead the intermediary to play an active role in conducting its service. But how should this apply to the extensive content moderation technologies of today? Where should the line be drawn for an intermediary not to be considered active? There is no further insight given on this. Hence, the intermediary will decide on that in light of the general

²⁷ The ECJ also considered this as an element in answering the question of eBay's liability from its users' sale of products that infringed the trademark rights of an owner. See Case C-324/09 *L'Oréal SA and Others v eBay International AG and Others* ECLI:EU:C:2011:474.

²⁸ Miriam Buiten, 'The Digital Services Act: From Intermediary Liability to Platform Regulation' (2021) <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3876328>> 2–4 accessed 10 September 2022.

²⁹ *L'Oréal* (n 27) paras 114–116.

³⁰ Van Eecke astutely states that the neutral role of hosting intermediaries should not be understood and construed as them being completely passive in the provision of services. See Patrick Van Eecke, 'Online Service Providers and Liability: A Plea for a Balanced Approach' (2011) 48 *Common Market Law Review* 1462, 1483. Van Hoboken and others also state '[i]n our view, they are not binary terms to be understood solely with reference to their ordinary meaning. Rather, they should be understood as terms of art that encompass a range of meanings – ascribed by the CJEU (and national courts) – along a potential spectrum of activities performed by intermediaries'. See Van Hoboken and others, 'Hosting Intermediary Services and Illegal Content Online: An Analysis of the Scope of Article 14 ECD in Light of Developments in the Online Service Landscape' European Commission (2018) 31–37 available at <op.europa.eu/nl/publication-detail/-/publication/7779caca-2537-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1> accessed 10 September 2022. See also Miquel Peguera, 'The Platform Neutrality Conundrum and the Digital Services Act' (2022) 53 *IIC – International Review of Intellectual Property and Competition Law* 681, 682; and De Streel and Husovec (n 14) 20.

³¹ Case C-324/09 *L'Oréal SA and Others v eBay International AG and Others*, Opinion of AG Jääskinen ECLI:EU:C:2010:757, para 146.

³² *ibid.*, para 113.

³³ Joined Cases C-682/18 and C-683/18 *Frank Peterson v Google LLC, YouTube LLC, YouTube Inc, Google Germany GmbH (C-682/18) and Elsevier Inc v Cyando AG* ECLI:EU:C:2021:503, para 109.

monitoring obligation, which will be addressed later.

Furthermore, there is a diligent economic operator test applied by the ECJ, which should also be considered in distinguishing active intermediaries from passive ones. Article 14 grants hosting intermediaries immunity depending on two qualifying conditions: either a hosting provider does not obtain awareness³⁴ as to the infringing content made available on its platform or acts expeditiously to remove or block access to the infringing content once it obtains awareness. Hence, assessing whether a provider has become aware of the infringing content is also important. Although this assessment is left to domestic courts to address under their national laws, the ECJ established that awareness should be assessed based on a 'diligent economic operator' criterion.³⁵ It went on to decide that³⁶ the courts should ask the question if a diligent economic operator 'should have identified the illegality in question and acted in accordance with Article 14(1)(b)' concerning 'every situation in which the provider concerned becomes aware, in one way or another of such facts or circumstances'.³⁷ This, however, would unlikely assist in setting the standard in practice for intermediaries to follow as the intermediaries' technical capabilities and sizes differ.³⁸ It is evident that the powers of relatively small or medium-sized intermediaries and their already implemented measures to investigate and prevent the illegality of content could hardly match the facilities of bigger intermediaries. The same applies to distinguishing a passive intermediary from an active one. Besides being of different size, intermediaries have various architectural structures and business models. Hence, setting a standard of diligence without paying attention to such differences and infrastructural advantages hardly assists in establishing a fair framework. In this regard, the DSA's approach of distinguishing digital services according to their sizes and impact on the digital world appears appropriate. How effective this could be will be

³⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, immunity from criminal liability depends, under Article 14, on obtaining actual knowledge. However, as this paper focuses only on the circumstances which give rise to civil liability, the actual knowledge standard is not discussed here.

³⁵ *L'Oréal* (n 27) para 120.

³⁶ *ibid*, paras 120–121.

³⁷ This test resembles the reasonable person test stemming from tort law which basically asks what a reasonable person of ordinary prudence would have done under the same or similar circumstances. For a detailed assessment, see Berrak Genç-Gelgeç, *The Law of Contributory Liability on the Internet: A Trademark Analysis* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2022) ch 3.

³⁸ It should also be recalled that, as the matter is left to domestic courts to decide under their applicable tort law, divergent interpretations and applications of the test would not be inevitable. Similarly, Synodinou argues that not having a uniform understanding of the term diligence would most likely bring fragmented applications across the EU. See Tatiana-Eleni Synodinou, 'Intermediaries Liability for Online Copyright Infringement in the EU: Evolutions and Confusions' (2015) 31 *Computer Law & Security Review* 66. De Streel and Husovec argue that 'the passivity criterion became the most controversial and led to the diverging outcomes on the national level because it allowed national courts to easily side-step the ECD'. See De Streel and Husovec (n 14) 20.

discussed later.

Reverting to Article 14, it is established that a hosting intermediary may also benefit from immunity even if it obtains awareness of the infringing content uploaded by third parties. Article 14(1)(b) requires a hosting intermediary to act *expeditiously* to remove or block access to the infringing content after obtaining awareness. As it was also clarified by the ECJ later in *L'Oréal*,³⁹ an intermediary can obtain awareness 'as the result of an investigation undertaken on its own initiative, an illegal activity or illegal information, as well as a situation in which the operator is notified of the existence of such an activity or such information'.

The latter is perhaps the most common way of obtaining awareness. Hence, intermediaries are encouraged to implement a mechanism that enables users to notify the provider regarding illegal content so that they take appropriate action (removal or disablement of the content). This reflects the NTD mechanism, as mentioned above. The ECD, however, does not establish a legal framework concerning the mechanism's procedures and elements, such as the requirements of notice and the timeframe for taking appropriate actions or safeguards for the parties involved.⁴⁰ This is left to Member States to regulate through self-regulation within their domestic laws.⁴¹ By virtue of this, some regulatory actions have been undertaken by Member States in their national laws, but their effectiveness has never been tested before the ECJ.⁴² Besides, these regulations generally focus on the specific type of illegality, like terrorism-related content or child abuse. More importantly, as a result of self-regulations, the rules and procedures of the NTD mechanism are heavily fragmented amongst the Member States.⁴³

Considering the lack of a legal framework, it would not be wrong to say that the applicable rules and procedures have been formed through the application of intermediaries' self-implemented mechanisms. Intermediaries usually implement necessary mechanisms to tackle illegal content and not lose the immunity provided by the ECD. This is the natural outcome of the approach adopted in the ECD, ie not confining intermediaries with hard law and liability rules to incentivise innovation. But it has failed to provide uniformity and strike a balance between the parties' fundamental rights that might be at stake. Article 14 requires the intermediary to take down or block access to the content infringing the rules

³⁹ *L'Oréal* (n 27) paras 121–125.

⁴⁰ Only Art 21(2) explicitly mentions notice and takedown mechanisms and it states that notice and those takedown procedures and the attribution of liability following the taking down of content shall also be analysed and included in the report that is required to be prepared by the Commission every two years after the ECD came into force.

⁴¹ ECD, recital 46.

⁴² De Streel and Husovec (n 14) 30.

⁴³ Commission, Online Services, Including e-Commerce, in the Single Market Accompanying the document Communication on 'A coherent framework to boost confidence in the Digital Single Market of e-commerce and other online services' SEC(2011) 1641 final, 3.4.4.

after receiving a notice. Hence, crucially it is the intermediary who examines the notification and the content and subsequently decides to take it down. This, however, raises serious concern about the protection of the fundamental rights of the parties, which is one of the main objectives of the ECD. When a rightsholder notifies an intermediary about the illegality of certain content, the intermediary's first task is to assess this claim and the content in question. Then, it decides to take down the content or block access to it if it finds the content illegal, as is claimed. Here, in dealing with the claim of illegality, an intermediary, a private company, acts similarly to a judge as it examines the claim and the illegality of the content. Such discretion appears problematic and perhaps detrimental, especially in protecting the content provider's right to freedom of expression and information. Moreover, if the content is mistakenly taken down or access to it is blocked, whether or not the content provider can challenge this decision is left to each Member State's rules if it provides any, or mostly intermediaries' own operation.⁴⁴ This would harm the protection of the content provider's right to a fair trial.

Content providers' fundamental rights are not the only concern regarding the application of the NTD mechanism. The mechanism may also affect the fundamental rights of other parties, such as the intermediary's right to conduct business and freedom of expression and the rightsholder's right to protection and access to justice.⁴⁵ Protection of these rights is, however, left to intermediaries, as they are the ones who implement and apply the NTD mechanism.

Moreover, the ECD does not set transparency or due diligence obligations for intermediaries to comply with. This strengthens the intermediaries' power in the digital world as they can act almost like lawmakers. These are left to the intermediaries' discretion and control. Although most of the Big Tech companies have transparency rules in their terms and conditions (TCs) and publish transparency reports on their content moderation activities, these are mostly criticised as not including essential and vital information as to their content moderation activities.⁴⁶ Hence, the transparency obligations imposed on them appears to have

⁴⁴ For instance, Facebook has implemented the Oversight Board system where a user can appeal against the takedown decision. However, this is only available for a specific type of content. The fact that Facebook is not obliged to apply the decision to all similar cases is criticised as this might result in controversy, especially concerning politics and democracy. See Elettra Bietti, 'A Genealogy of Digital Platform Regulation' (2022) 7 *Georgetown Law and Technology Review* (forthcoming) available at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.385948>> accessed 10 September 2022. For detailed information on Facebook's Oversight Board, see <<https://www.facebook.com/help/711867306096893>>.

⁴⁵ The CJEU first pointed out the importance of the application of the balancing test in Case C-275/06 *Productores de Música de España (Promusicae) v Telefónica de España SAU* ECLI:EU:C:2008:54.

⁴⁶ Goodman (n 15); Mathew Ingram, 'Facebook "Transparency Report" Turns Out to Be Anything But' (*Columbia Journalism Review*, 26 August 2021) <www.cjr.org/the_media_today/facebook-transparency-report-turns-out-to-be-anything-but.php> accessed 10 September 2022.

been the right step towards protecting fundamental rights and balancing the intermediaries' powers.

The NTD mechanism, apart from putting intermediaries in a judge-like position, can hardly be said to assist in achieving the goal of tackling illegal content effectively. As immunity rules apply horizontally, intermediaries may receive notifications about the illegality of content or information arising from different substantive rights. Examples are defamation, trademark infringement claims, etc. An intermediary is the one who examines those claims. However, such an assessment may require legal knowledge or even expertise unless the content is manifestly illegal. For instance, in *L'Oréal*, eBay was expected to assess whether the content had infringed the trademark of a rightsholder. This assessment required eBay to examine the authenticity of the products bearing L'Oréal trademarks. In another case, an intermediary may be required to assess the legality of a digital copy of a movie in terms of copyright infringement⁴⁷ or the nature of the comments left on the platform to see whether this amounts to defamation, hate speech or incitement to violence.⁴⁸

It is evident that intermediaries, especially the Big Tech companies, have implemented automated systems like artificial intelligence (AI) to tackle the availability of illegal or infringing content on their platforms. For instance, YouTube has a Content ID mechanism, an automated content moderation system to identify copyright infringements.⁴⁹ Although such automated mechanisms might be time-efficient and practical compared to human moderation, they might not capture all kinds of policy violations or infringements. For example, it would often be difficult for an AI without human intervention to identify and distinguish fair use of copyright-protected content from an infringement. In such cases, an intermediary might be inclined to take down the content to benefit from immunity, as the ECD does not impose any sanction or transparency obligations on intermediaries for a false or unfair takedown. This could also 'damage user experience by over-detection and the generation of

⁴⁷ In fact, in terms of copyright infringement, providers might be required to apply the test of 'communication to the public' as per Art 3(1) of the InfoSoc Directive 2001/29 to take further action. This indeed requires additional expertise. On this, see Neville Cordell and Beverley Potts, 'Communication to the Public or Accessory Liability: Is the CJEU Using Communication to the Public to Harmonise Accessory Liability Across the EU?' (2018) 40(5) European Intellectual Property Review 289.

⁴⁸ The judgments *Delfi AS v Estonia* App no 64569/09 (ECtHR, 16 June 2015); *Magyar Tartalomszolgáltatók Egyesülete (MTE) and Index.hu Zrt v Hungary* App no 22947/13 (ECtHR, 2 February 2016); and *Pihl v Sweden* App no 74742/14 (ECtHR, 7 February 2017) of the European Court of Human Rights could be illustrative of this. In those cases, the platforms were expected to assess the nature of the comments and take the appropriate action to deal with them, although they were not considered intermediaries.

⁴⁹ See <<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2797370?hl=en>> accessed 10 September 2022.

false-positives'.⁵⁰ The same concerns were raised about Facebook's own automated mechanisms by Facebook itself in 'Facebook Response to EC Public Consultation on the Digital Services Act (DSA)'.⁵¹ As mentioned above, the intermediaries' transparency reports do not provide sufficient information and figures on these processes. It is submitted that this may pose a severe risk to fundamental rights and raise difficulties in providing uniform rules for the digital world. On the other hand, taking down the content in order to benefit from immunity without explicitly examining the content may not be a much-desired action for intermediaries, given that the contents attract users and cause interaction. Here, the DSA's transparency obligations seem to iron out the risks and difficulties attributed to the procedures of tackling illegal content, as it provides standards for different intermediaries to follow and comply with. However, the conclusion should be made after evaluating the rules.

Along with the immunity regime, injunction orders should also be addressed. The application of an injunction order by the courts against intermediaries is made possible in Articles 12(3), 13(3) and 14(3) ECD. As clearly stated in these articles, applying an injunction order is not bound to the immunity question. This means that qualifying or not qualifying for immunity does not affect the imposition of such orders. However, they are still germane to the immunity regime and have been assisting in defining the framework. Injunction orders serve to tackle infringements by imposing ex-post obligations on intermediaries. These measures are grounded on the principle of best cost avoider, meaning that the measures should be applied by 'the party that has or can develop measures to avoid the harm most cheaply'.⁵² In this sense, injunction orders also seem to serve the DSA's purpose of balancing the power given to intermediaries, as they are the best cost avoiders considering their infrastructural advantages and self-implemented measures. Such orders have also proven to be popular among rightsholders, especially owners of intellectual property rights, to combat online infringements. However, the implementation of injunctions has not been straightforward in practice. It is mainly because these orders are left to each national court to apply under their national laws. Moreover, the ECD only sets out a rule on the prohibition of the general monitoring obligation in Article 15, which applies to injunction orders.

⁵⁰ This was the statement by one of the online providers in the EU Study on 'Online Platforms' Moderation of Illegal Content Online'. See the detailed analysis in Alexandre De Stree and others, 'Online Platforms' Moderation of Illegal Content Online', Study for the committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies (European Parliament, Luxembourg 2020).

⁵¹ 'Facebook Response to EC Public Consultation on the Digital Services Act (DSA)' (Facebook, 2020) <<https://about.fb.com/de/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/09/FINAL-FB-Response-to-DSA-Consultations.pdf>> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁵² Martin Husovec, 'Accountable, Not Liable: Injunctions Against Intermediaries' (2016) TILEC Discussion Paper No 2016-012 (Draft) 25 <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2773768/> accessed 10 September 2022.

Complementing the ECD on injunction orders, there is also the Enforcement Directive 2004/48,⁵³ which enables rightsholders to apply for an injunction against an intermediary for infringements of intellectual property rights specifically excluding copyright (as another directive⁵⁴ directly applies to copyright cases). It sets out the principles for an injunction measure in Article 3.⁵⁵ Under this, an injunction measure shall be effective in reaching its aim while not being costly or unfair or open for abuse.⁵⁶ These are the minimum standards that Member States' courts should consider in assessing injunction requests made against an intermediary to prevent unreasonable and disproportionate burdens on intermediaries.

In addition, the ECJ's case law provides further insight but limited to the issues brought before it. In those cases, the ECJ was challenged to address whether an injunction could be ordered for future infringements of the same kind or for an unlimited time and how to balance the fundamental rights that might be at stake in granting an injunction order.⁵⁷ In dealing with these, the ECJ first and foremost underlined the significance of protecting the fundamental rights of the parties affected by an injunction order. As for NTD mechanisms, an injunction order involves three parties: intermediaries, content providers, and rightsholders. The fundamental rights of these parties would also be affected. The rights that would be at stake were identified by the ECJ as follows: the content provider's right to freedom of expression and information; the right to the protection of personal data and privacy or the right to a fair trial; the intermediary's right to conduct business and the right to freedom of expression; and the rightsholder's right to protection and access to justice.⁵⁸ Accordingly, the Court's appraisals focused on striking a balance between the fundamental rights at stake.

⁵³ Directive (EC) 2004/48 of 29 April 2004 on the enforcement of intellectual property rights [2004] OJ L195/16.

⁵⁴ Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC [2019] OJ L130/92.

⁵⁵ Art 3(1) of Enforcement Directive 2004/48 states that an injunction measure 'shall be fair and equitable and shall not be unnecessarily complicated or costly or entail unreasonable time-limits or unwarranted delay' and Art 3(2) states that it 'shall also be effective, proportionate and dissuasive and shall be applied in such a manner as to avoid the criterion of barrier to legitimate trade and to provide for safeguards as against their abuse'.

⁵⁶ For proportionality in injunction cases, see Toby Headdon, 'Beyond Liability: On the Availability and the Scope of Injunctions Against Online Intermediaries After *L'Oréal v eBay*' (2012) 34(3) European Intellectual Property Review 137, 139–141; Pekka Savola, 'Proportionality of Website Blocking: Internet Connectivity Providers as Copyright Enforcers' (2014) 5 Journal of Intellectual Property, Information, Technology and E-Commerce Law 116.

⁵⁷ *L'Oréal* (n 27).

⁵⁸ Case C-70/10 *Scarlet Extended SA v Société belge des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs SCRL (SABAM)* ECLI:EU:C:2011:771; Case C-314/12 *UPC Telekabel Wien GmbH v Constantin Film Verleih GmbH, Wega Filmproduktionsgesellschaft GmbH* ECLI:EU:C:2014:192.

The outcomes of these cases can be summarised as follows. An injunction order requiring an intermediary to implement a filtering system as applicable to all its users and for an unlimited time should not be granted, as such measures would amount to general monitoring⁵⁹ and would harm the balance between the fundamental rights of the parties. However, in another case, the imposition of a generic order was considered in compliance with EU law as long as the chosen measure strikes a balance between the parties' fundamental rights.⁶⁰ A generic order means that an injunction order is granted against an intermediary without determining the type of the injunction. Here, the intermediary chooses the appropriate mechanism to prevent the availability of illegal content and applies it. Requiring an intermediary to select a measure that respects the fundamental rights of the parties was undoubtedly in accordance with the law concerned in that case,⁶¹ but leaving the duty to take care of the fundamental rights of the parties would give rise to the very same concern that is pointed out for the NTD mechanism. In this case, the intermediary was given judge-like discretion without specifying the borders in assessing and choosing the most appropriate measure that also protects fundamental rights. This could hardly strike a balance between the parties.

Lately, the Member States were also given the green light to extend the scope of the previously ordered injunction to be effective worldwide for content that is identical or equivalent to the content regarded as illegal before.⁶² This case concerned an injunction order requiring the hosting intermediary to remove the defamatory content. The ECJ held that this intermediary might also be required to monitor and search for information – which is identical or has equivalent meaning to the content regarded as defamatory before – by such a measure. The act of monitoring is limited to 'information conveying a message the content of which remains essentially unchanged'.⁶³ The Court found that such a measure would not amount to a general monitoring obligation prohibited by Article 15. Unfortunately, the decision did not clarify the application of Article 15 and injunction orders. First, here an injunction order was given an extraterritorial effect 'within the framework of relevant international law'.⁶⁴ However, the application of such an injunction within other legal systems

⁵⁹ Case C-360/10 *Société belge des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs SCRL (SABAM) v Netlog* ECLI:EU:C:2011:771. This case concerned an injunction requested against a social networking platform for the content infringing copyrights of the rightsholders.

⁶⁰ Case C-314/12 *UPC Telekabel Wien GmbH v Constantin Film Verleih GmbH, Wega Filmproduktionsgesellschaft GmbH* ECLI:EU:C:2014:192. Here, the injunction order was requested against an ISP for the availability of unauthorised copies of the movies protected by copyright.

⁶¹ It was a referral from an Austrian court, and it was possible to grant a generic order under Austrian national law. Hence, the impact of the case might remain limited.

⁶² Case C-18/18 *Eva Glawischnig-Piesczek v Facebook Ireland Limited* ECLI:EU:C:2019:821.

⁶³ *ibid.*, para 53.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

might raise concern over the protection of fundamental rights, given that a balance between fundamental rights might be struck differently under different jurisdictions.⁶⁵ Second, the ECJ did not clearly determine the borders of the concerned injunction. Although it was held that a search could be done for information that is identical or has equivalent meaning, assessing if the information has equivalent meaning is open to interpretation. In this respect, it is hard to conclude that the injunction ordered can be classified as specific. Determining the borders of the 'specific' monitoring obligation is, however, important, as a monitoring obligation can only be imposed on the intermediaries for specific cases under Article 15. As no insight is provided by the ECD or the ECJ,⁶⁶ what should be considered a 'specific' monitoring obligation remains a challenging task for the national courts. This should be decided under their national laws.

Against this background, it can be concluded that the current regime of intermediaries' liability does not seem to achieve the goals of the ECD thoroughly. The ECD's main objective is to establish a properly functioning single market for digital services by providing uniform rules and focusing on the protection of the fundamental rights of the parties. As far as the immunity regime is concerned, it establishes the general principles, but the application of these rules hardly provides uniformity. As demonstrated, fragmentation mainly arises out of the application of the NTD mechanism. The ECD does not establish any framework for this. This is left to the Member States and their national laws. In a similar sense, the ECJ does not provide a clear understanding of what should be understood as a passive/active intermediary for courts to follow in assessing hosting intermediaries' immunity. It does not take the intermediaries' differences into account, either. More importantly, the application of the current law seems to point out that the biggest obstacle in ensuring harmonisation is the discretion given to the intermediaries regarding the matters relevant to the immunity regime and tackling illegal content. This, as shown, raises serious concerns over the protection of fundamental rights. It is submitted that this appears to be due to the approach adopted, the lack of further guidance, and the lack of transparency obligations. Indeed, the European Commission's Impact Assessment⁶⁷ on the ECD similarly emphasises these matters. The DSA accordingly and plausibly focuses on them while reproducing the immunity regime almost

⁶⁵ Federico Fabbrini and Edoardo Celeste, 'The Right to Be Forgotten in the Digital Age: The Challenges of Data Protection Beyond Borders' (2020) 21 German Law Journal 55, 64.

⁶⁶ In *L'Oréal*, the ECJ was asked whether an intermediary would be under a duty to apply the same measure for future infringements of a same or similar kind, but the question was left unanswered. See *L'Oréal* (n 27). The Advocate General in his opinion stated that an intermediary could apply the measure to prevent the same or similar infringements committed by the same person in the future as this would not amount to general monitoring. See Opinion of AG Jääskinen in *L'Oréal* (n 31) para 181.

⁶⁷ Commission, 'Impact Assessment Accompanying the Document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Single Market for Digital Services (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC' (Staff Working Document) SWD (2020) 348 final, Part 1 (Impact Assessment Part 1).

verbatim. Whether it does provide the necessary answers will now be examined.

3 Regulating digital platforms: the DSA

As the two main legislative initiatives of the Commission's digital strategy, the DSA and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) aim to regulate digital services, especially those that have become dominant players on the Internet, economically and socially. The fact that the DSA applies to all digital services which provide services to users who are established or residents of the EU (regardless of the intermediaries' place of establishment) demonstrates that these companies, ie Big Tech, are the main focus as most of them are established outside the EU.⁶⁸ The DSA's main objective is to update the rules governing digital services, namely the ECD,⁶⁹ while the DMA's is to provide a competitive and fair digital market for digital services. To this end, both Acts are adopted as a regulation. This means that once the DSA comes into force, it is to be binding 'in its entirety and directly applicable'⁷⁰ in all Member States. This could be considered the right step toward uniformity, as the rules will be expected to apply uniformly.⁷¹

Besides the choice of instrument, the legislators' approach to regulating digital services should also be referred to before discussing the proposed rules. Like the ECD, the DSA provides the rules for information society services.⁷² However, unlike the ECD, the DSA does not consider only the providers of Internet intermediaries. Along with certain intermediary services, namely mere conduit, caching, and hosting, the DSA acknowledges new digital services, such as online platforms and search engines. An online platform is a hosting service provider that stores and disseminates

⁶⁸ DSA, Art 1(a)(1). Art 11 obliges such intermediaries to appoint a legal representative.

⁶⁹ However, it complements existing sector-specific legislation (such as Directive 2010/13/EU on Audiovisual Media Services) and existing EU laws regulating certain aspects of intermediaries (such as Regulation (EU) 2019/1150 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on promoting fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation services). These are applicable as *leges speciales*. See Explanatory Memorandum to the DSA proposal, Commission Proposal for a Regulation on a Single Market for Digital Services (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC, 15 December 2020, COM(2020)825 final.

⁷⁰ Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [2012] OJ C326/47, Art 288(2).

⁷¹ Having said that, making relevant national laws in line with the DSA and complying with the rules (especially for digital services) would take time, as was experienced with the application of the GDPR. See EU Commission press release, 'General Data Protection Regulation Shows Results, But Work Needs to Continue' (EU Commission, 24 July 2019) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_4449> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁷² Information society services are defined as 'any service normally provided for remuneration, at a distance, by electronic means and at the individual request of a recipient' in Directive (EU) 2015/1535 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 September 2015 laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical regulations and of rules on Information Society services [2015] OJ L241/1.

nates information to the public.⁷³ So, an online platform is differentiated from a hosting service provider as the latter only stores information but does not disseminate it. Dissemination is making information available to an unlimited number of third parties at the request of the provider of that information.⁷⁴ An online search engine, on the other hand, is defined 'as a digital service that allows users to input queries to perform searches of, in principle, all websites, or all websites in a particular language, on the basis of a query on any subject in the form of a keyword, voice request, phrase or other input, and returns results in any format in which information related to the requested content can be found'.⁷⁵ As digital services are distinguished according to the services provided, the DSA establishes a legal framework that takes account of these differences. The creation of asymmetric due diligence and transparency obligations is a part of this approach.

The rules established by the DSA can be categorised under three main categories: immunity rules, due diligence obligations, and enforcement. These will be addressed now, but not as a whole. They will be addressed within the relevance of the article's aim.

3.1 Immunity rules

Starting with the immunity regime, the DSA reproduces the ECD's immunity regime in Articles 3–9, as they are still considered instrumental in creating the digital single market, despite the present fragmentation over the implementation of some principles.⁷⁶ Articles 12–14 of the ECD, are incorporated within Articles 3–5 of the DSA with a small addition. The addition is made to Article 5, which concerns hosting intermediaries. According to Article 5(3), providers of an online platform that intermediate between traders and customers cannot benefit from immunity from liability arising from customer protection law when a provider 'lead[s] an average consumer to believe that the information [...] is provided either by the online platform itself or by a recipient of the service who is acting under its authority or control'. This article applies to online marketplaces and excludes them from immunity if their liability from customer protection law arises when they act in a certain way.⁷⁷

⁷³ DSA, Art 2(h).

⁷⁴ DSA, Art 2(ha). However, this definition is criticised as its application to providers who do not directly face customers in a contractual relationship, such as cloud services, may be challenging. See European Parliament, Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), Background Paper for the workshop 'The Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act: A Forward-looking and Consumer-centred Perspective' (*European Parliament*, 26 May 2021) 5 <www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/234761/21-05-19%20Background%20note%20REV%20final.pdf> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁷⁵ DSA, Art 2(ha)(i).

⁷⁶ DSA, recital 16.

⁷⁷ The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), the Digital Services Act – BEUC position paper (BEUC, 9 April 2021) 9 <www.beuc.eu/publications/beuc-x-2021-032_the_digital_services_act_proposal.pdf> accessed 10 September 2022.

In addition to this new addition to the article, some matters are dealt with within the recitals. In the light of the ECJ's case law, it is now clearly stated that only the specific service of an intermediary in which an alleged infringement is committed should be considered in assessing whether an intermediary will benefit from immunity.⁷⁸ Taking Google as an example, it should be regarded as a caching service concerning its referencing service, whilst it might qualify as a hosting service regarding its keywords service since it enables its users to purchase keywords and display them as advertisements.⁷⁹ More crucially, the ECJ's ruling on the neutrality standard in *L'Oréal*⁸⁰ is included in recital 18 for clarity. The recital accordingly prescribes that an intermediary should not be considered to be providing its service neutrally when it 'plays an active role of such a kind as to give it knowledge of, or control over, those data'.⁸¹

Further, it is established that if an intermediary deliberately collaborates with its users to make illegal content available, it should not be deemed as providing its service neutrally.⁸² In this regard, the DSA, unfortunately, does not give any answer to the criticism raised about the implementation of the neutrality test. It seems the legislator misses an opportunity to provide clarification or even review the applicability of the test to extensive content moderation technologies. Moreover, setting a standard of deliberate collaboration indicates the prospects of more ambiguity. The assessment of 'deliberate' is open to interpretation. How this is to be applied with the already problematic neutrality test under the DSA is therefore doubted.

Along with these relatively unaltered articles, the subsequent articles bring new principles relevant to the immunity regime. Article 6 prescribes that solely carrying out their voluntary own-initiative investigations will not be considered a factor in making intermediaries ineligible

⁷⁸ DSA, recital 27(a).

⁷⁹ This was actually one of the questions referred to the CJEU in Joined Cases C-236/08 to C-238/08 *Google France* ECLI:EU:C:2010:159. Although the CJEU did not address the question, the AG's opinion was that the immunity of an intermediary should be assessed according to the specific activity of the service at stake, as Recital 27(a) DSA establishes. See Joined Cases C-236/08 to C-238/08 *Google France* ECLI:EU:C:2009:569, Opinion of Advocate General Poiares Maduro, para 140.

⁸⁰ Joined Cases C-236/08 to C-238/08 *Google France* ECLI:EU:C:2010:159, para 110; *L'Oréal* (n 27) para 113.

⁸¹ The DSA, recital 18 further establishes 'the mere ranking or displaying in an order, or the use of a recommender system should not, however, be deemed as having control over an information'.

⁸² DSA, recital 20.

for immunity.⁸³ The implementation of voluntary mechanisms by intermediaries is not something new. Intermediaries have already been implemented in such mechanisms, especially automated ones. It is also implicitly encouraged by the ECD since the ECD requires them to act against illegal content to benefit from immunity. Even the ECJ held in *YouTube v Cyando* that the hosting provider's implementation of measures aimed at detecting illegal content on its platform should not be considered as giving an active role to the intermediary in conducting its service.⁸⁴ Now, the DSA explicitly encourages intermediaries to implement voluntary mechanisms and carry out their investigation to tackle illegal content. But the question is, does the DSA provide the solution for the issues arising from the application of voluntary obligations that were addressed before?

Article 6 limits the scope of voluntary actions that may be taken. It states that voluntary mechanisms cannot be considered as giving an active role to the intermediary only when voluntary investigations and measures are taken in good faith and in a diligent manner. Recital 25 explains that such acting 'should include acting in an objective, non-discriminatory and proportionate manner, with due regard to the rights and legitimate interests of all parties involved and providing the necessary safeguards against unjustified removal of legal content, in accordance with the objective and requirements of this Regulation'. However, this does not assist the interpretation of good faith and diligent manner. For instance, it is difficult to answer whether an intermediary is regarded as diligent when it applies the measure, but fails to detect the illegality.⁸⁵ Crucially, intermediaries will be the judge of whether they act in good faith or diligently. This might be a challenging and undesirable task for them, as they would not want to trigger the awareness or knowledge threshold that would mean a loss of immunity. Thus, there is doubt about how these standards would be implemented effectively and uniformly in practice. Hence, the framework on voluntary mechanisms should not be considered complete. On the other hand, the DSA imposes transparency obligations on digital services, which will be examined below. These might assist in establishing more concrete standards in applying voluntary measures.

Article 7 is another threshold that applies to voluntary mechanisms. Article 7 reproduces the ECD's general monitoring obligation. It prohibits

⁸³ DSA, recital 25. This article is called the 'Good Samaritan Clause' after the US's Communications Decency Act S.230. However, Article 6 appears different from the US' Good Samaritan Clause. Moreover, Savin argues that this article has no reforming effect, although it is a new addition to the immunity regime. See Andrej Savin, 'The EU Digital Services Act: Towards a More Responsible Internet' (2021) Copenhagen Business School Law Research Paper No 21-04, Journal of Internet Law 6 <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3786792> accessed 10 September 2022. See also Eifert and others (n 9); Buiten (n 28) 2–4; Alexandra Kuczerawy, 'The Good Samaritan That Wasn't: Voluntary Monitoring Under the (draft) Digital Services Act' (*Verfassungsblog*, 12 January 2021) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/good-samaritan-dsa/>> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁸⁴ Peguera states that this was the ECJ's anticipation that such a 'Good Samaritan clause' was to be included in the DSA. See Peguera (n 30) 682–683.

⁸⁵ Kuczerawy (n 83).

the imposition of a general monitoring obligation and an obligation that would require intermediaries to seek facts or circumstances actively. As a general monitoring obligation is an important tool for confining the application of content moderation, it is crucial for the DSA to include this prohibition. However, it would not be realistic to expect that the existing fragmentation on the interpretation of general monitoring would fade, as the assessment of the scope of specific or general monitoring is for Member State courts in light of the ECJ's case law. Moreover, in terms of voluntary actions, intermediaries assess whether the implemented action qualifies as general or specific monitoring. This again raises questions over the protection of fundamental rights addressed above.

Following on, Article 8 sets out the framework for orders issued by national courts or administrative authorities against an intermediary which applies against a specific item of illegal content, ie injunction orders. In that regard, Member States are required to issue orders that clearly define the scope of a measure and that indicate the illegal content with information on its exact location, why it is considered illegal and its legal basis, as well as the redress mechanisms available under national or EU law. On the other hand, intermediaries must inform the issuing authority about the actions taken, such as the specific type of action and its effects. Similar conditions are also established for issuing an order requiring an intermediary to provide information on a specific user or users under Article 9. For both cases, intermediaries must also inform the recipient, whom the order concerns, about the order applied and the available redress possibilities.

Taking all these into account, it would not be wrong to conclude that Articles 8–9 are essential steps towards establishing more balanced enforcement mechanisms and a regulatory framework. As addressed, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and a balance between the parties' powers and positions have proven challenging under the ECD. However, establishing the conditions and requirements for both the imposition and application of these orders, and giving parties the right to have an effective remedy, would undoubtedly assist in ironing out such concerns.

3.2 *Due diligence obligations*

The DSA establishes due diligence obligations for digital services in Articles 10–37. These obligations are perhaps the most significant aspect of the DSA. Digital services are classified into four categories: intermediaries (Articles 10–13), hosting intermediaries including online platforms (Articles 14–15), online platforms (Articles 16–24), and VLOPs and VLOSEs (Articles 25–33). As stated, the legislator's aim was to regulate new means of digital services (especially Big Tech) while benefiting from their technical and operational ability in preventing the availability of illegal content and protecting fundamental rights. Hence, considering digital

services according to their sizes and role within the online world appears to be fit for purpose. As a result of this approach, first, hosting intermediaries are distinguished from other intermediaries (namely, mere conduit, caching intermediaries), on whom more duties are imposed. Second, hosting intermediaries are differentiated depending on their service and their sizes. Hosting platforms which store and disseminate information are required to do more. Finally, online platforms and online search engines with more than 45 million recipients, VLOPs and the VLOSEs, have more formal and administrative duties.⁸⁶ This is sensible considering that these have technical and operational abilities and, perhaps more importantly, social and economic influence over the Internet. As the previous part shows, the impact exerted by these platforms should be balanced to create a fairer online environment. In this respect, the DSA imposes due diligence obligations regarding transparency, accountability and information. However, only the obligations relevant to the paper's main objective will be addressed here.

Starting with the transparency obligations, all intermediaries are required by Article 13 to publish a detailed report every year on the operation of their content moderation. The article also expressly stipulates what information should be included in the report. Briefly, information that would provide transparency regarding the intermediaries' way of tackling infringing content must be included in the report. For instance, the type of measures undertaken and the reasons, the timeframes for taking action against complaints received through the internal complaint-handling system, decisions undertaken against these complaints, etc. Article 13(1)(e) also requires the inclusion of information on 'any use made of automated means for the purpose of content moderation, including a qualitative description, a specification of the precise purposes, indicators of the accuracy and the possible rate of error of the automated means used in fulfilling those purposes, and any safeguards applied'. Importantly, this obligation is applicable for the measures undertaken as a result of injunction orders issued under Articles 8 and 9, as well as for actions undertaken as a result of intermediaries' initiatives. This is significant, especially for the concern arising from the lack of transparency in applying the voluntarily implemented measures. Such transparency reporting obligations should assist in balancing the distribution of power through the Internet since companies need to be more transparent about their content moderation technologies.

Further, these hosting intermediaries, including online platforms, are given more transparency duties concerning the application of notice and action mechanisms that they are obliged to implement within their system.⁸⁷ In addition to these, providers of online platforms are required

⁸⁶ Here, it should be underlined that fewer due diligence obligations are imposed on VLOSEs than on VLOPs. These obligations concern crisis response mechanism (Art 27a) and supervisory fees (Art 33a-b).

⁸⁷ DSA, Art 23.

to give more information since they are obliged to implement an internal complaint-handling system for their notice and action mechanisms and to make available out-of-court dispute settlement possibilities for their users.⁸⁸ Briefly, online platforms must include information on these in their reports, such as the number of disputes referred to an out-of-court dispute settlement body, which disputes are referred to the body, and the average time needed to complete the proceedings.⁸⁹ With regard to the notice and action and internal compliant-handling systems implemented, the decisions must be published and a statement of reasons given for the action taken without undue delay, and the information must be provided in a way that is user-friendly and easily accessible to the users.⁹⁰ A very similar obligation is also set for online advertisements.⁹¹ Online platforms must display online advertisements clearly and unambiguously and inform users about the parameters to determine the target users for the advertisements. Finally, online platforms are required to publish a report demonstrating their average monthly active recipients of the service.⁹² This is necessary to keep track of the number of their users as this is a standard set to distinguish an online platform from the VLOP.

VLOPs have more duties imposed on them. In terms of transparency obligations, further to the obligations stated above, they are required to create a repository for the advertisements presented on their online interfaces. This must be made available to the public and be presented until one year after the last time the advertisement was shown.⁹³ It is stated that this repository must consist of the relevant information concerning advertisements, such as the advertisement's content, the period of its display, and the natural or legal person on whose behalf the advertisement is displayed. Finally, additional transparency reporting obligations are imposed on VLOPs for the measures undertaken in dealing with illegal content. In addition to the duty – of every intermediary – to publish a report on the content moderation and measures applied, VLOPs are required to publish this report every six months. More importantly, they must include additional information on the human resources used in content moderation in the report.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ DSA, Arts 17–18.

⁸⁹ DSA, Art 23(1).

⁹⁰ DSA, Art 23(2a).

⁹¹ DSA, Art 24. The same transparency obligation is established for the recommender systems used by online platforms in Art 24(a).

⁹² DSA, Art 23(2)–(3).

⁹³ DSA, Art 30.

⁹⁴ DSA, Art 33(1)(1): '(b) the human resources that the provider of very large online platforms dedicates to content moderation in respect of the service offered in the Union, for each official language of the Union as applicable, including for compliance with the obligations set out in Articles 14 and 19, as well as for compliance with the obligations set out in Article 17; (c) the qualifications and linguistic expertise of the persons carrying out the activities referred to in point (a), as well as the training and support given to such staff; (d) the indicators of accuracy and related information referred to in Article 13(1), point (e), per official languages of the Union, as applicable'.

Concerning the general framework on transparency obligations of the DSA, the first thing to say is that detailed and tiered rules on transparency should be welcomed. As shown, lack of transparency has been one of the obstacles in establishing a uniform and fair framework under the ECD. Intermediaries have had their own transparency reports on their content moderation activities, but these are mostly criticised for not containing crucial information. The DSA, however, sets out the standards for this. Information that must be included in these reports is clearly established. More significantly, the formality and stringency of these obligations are increased for online platforms and VLOPs, which are required to publish transparency reports on their content moderation technologies every six months. The obligations concerning online advertisements appear to be an effective tool in establishing a fairer digital environment. Advertisements are potent tools for big intermediaries to attract users and promote their content without their users' knowledge. This is done through the parameters used. Establishing transparency obligations on the advertisements presented in their online interface and the parameters used should provide more transparency and lead to fair use of the parameters. This could also assist in limiting the acquired impact and power of online intermediaries, especially VLOPs, over their users' choices and the way they disseminate information. Such transparency obligations might also indirectly have an impact on tackling illegal content, given that advertisement systems risk disseminating illegal content or financially incentivising harmful or illegal content. This appears to target where the ECD fell short regarding transparency. But the rules may still benefit from further insight. For instance, additional rules may be provided on the structure and content of the transparency reports to prevent platforms from publishing strategically structured reports.⁹⁵

The notice and action mechanism established by the DSA should also be addressed with transparency obligations. The detailed reporting and transparency obligations set out for the notice and action mechanism appear assistive in determining the framework of the mechanism and providing more uniformly applied measures. However, whether the rules established by the DSA could deliver its promise as to the notice and action mechanism should be addressed.

In contrast to the ECD, the DSA explicitly requires hosting intermediaries, including online platforms, to implement notice and action mechanisms in their systems, and establishes the mechanism's elements to a certain extent. Articles 14–15 set the framework of the notice and action mechanism, then Articles 16–23 bring further obligations for online plat-

⁹⁵ BEUC position paper (n 77).

forms (excluding micro and small enterprises)⁹⁶ to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights of the parties affected by the application of the measures. The established system works in the following way: the hosting intermediary implements a mechanism that enables users to issue notifications electronically for the item claimed to be illegal. This notification, however, should include certain information on the claim to be regarded as valid and taken into account by a hosting intermediary.⁹⁷ In this regard, the issuer of the notification is first required to provide sufficient information, such as the exact URL(s) of the content, to a hosting intermediary for it to be able to identify the concerned content successfully. It is then required to substantiate its claim by providing the reasons why the concerned content is considered illegal, with evidence, if any. A statement of good faith confirming the accuracy of the claim and the completeness of information are other elements of a valid notification.

The issuance of a valid notice (ie a notice which comprises all the elements mentioned above) is vital for both the issuer and the hosting intermediary. First, the hosting intermediary can only take into account the notice and then act if it is valid. Second, being served a valid notice would give rise to actual knowledge or awareness if it allows 'a diligent provider of hosting services to identify the illegality of the relevant activity or information without a detailed legal examination'.⁹⁸ Here, again, the evaluation of diligence comes to the fore as a standard. As shown, the diligence assessment depends on the specifics of the case. The hosting intermediary should assess if the concerned notice would allow any other diligent provider to identify the illegality of the content before taking action. This assessment may result in the hosting intermediary triggering the knowledge/awareness threshold.⁹⁹ Hence, there is still a chance of the intermediary acting without properly examining the content. This might result in over-removals.

Reverting to the working principle of the mechanisms, the hosting intermediary must act against content claimed to be illegal or infringing once it has been served with a valid notification. It is also explained in recital 41(a) that identification of the illegality of content without a detailed legal examination means that the illegality of the content is clear. Against such content, a hosting intermediary may decide 'the removal of, the disabling of access to, the demotion of, the restriction of the visibility of the information or the suspension or termination of monetary payments

⁹⁶ DSA, Art 16. Micro and small enterprises are specified in Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. According to Articles 2–3, 'a small enterprise is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 10 million'; whereas 'a microenterprise is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million'.

⁹⁷ DSA, Art 14(2).

⁹⁸ DSA, Art 14(3).

⁹⁹ DSA, Art 14(3).

related to that information or [to] impose[s] other measures with regard to the information'.¹⁰⁰ The decision process should be carried out in a diligent, timely, objective and non-arbitrary manner.¹⁰¹ The decision must be supported by a statement of reasons which includes information on the territorial scope and the duration of the decision; the legal grounds¹⁰² proving why the specific action is taken; the facts and circumstances relied on; and whether the decision is made in light of information obtained as a result of the notification submitted or an injunction order or through its voluntary own-initiative investigations. More significantly, the issuer of the notice should be provided with clear and understandable information on the redress possibilities that might be pursued.

As far as the mechanism is concerned, it is evident that the DSA establishes a framework for the mechanism by setting out the minimum standards for hosting intermediaries to follow in tackling illegal content. More importantly, these rules set the standards for actions undertaken as a result of injunction orders as well as voluntary own-initiative investigations. As discussed above, as an enforcement mechanism, the application of the notice and action mechanisms¹⁰³ is directly related to protecting the parties' fundamental rights. However, the NTD mechanism stipulated by the ECD has failed to ensure this for all the parties concerned since crucial discretion to take down the content is left to intermediaries without providing any safeguards. Having set the minimum elements and having clarified what a valid notification should be composed of and what the hosting intermediary should do in assessing the claim, and what it should do after deciding on the action, the DSA provides significant insight and necessary attention to matters that the ECD has so far failed to consider. It is also substantial that transparency obligations support the rules on notice and action mechanisms. Besides, because the DSA is a regulation, the established framework would be expected to become more uniformly applied since the rules would be directly applicable and binding in all Member States. These can all be said to be the right steps to fulfil the regulation's main objectives: the protection of fundamental rights and harmonisation.

¹⁰⁰ DSA, Art 15(2)(a).

¹⁰¹ DSA, Art 14 (6).

¹⁰² DSA, Arts 15(2d)–15(2e). If the decision concerns a claim of illegality, the legal ground relied on making the decision should be provided with sufficient explanations. If, however, it concerns the content's incompatibility with TCs, the contractual ground relied on should be provided with sufficient explanations.

¹⁰³ The notice and action is an umbrella term comprising different variants of notice mechanisms categorised according to the type of action taken after receiving the notice, such as notice and takedown, notice and stay down, or notice and notice. For an examination of these different mechanisms from the fundamental rights aspect, see Christina Angelopoulos and Stijn Smet, 'Notice-and-fair-balance: How to Reach a Compromise Between Fundamental Rights in European Intermediary Liability' (2016) 8(2) *Journal of Media Law* 274; Alexandra Kuczerawy, 'From "Notice and Take Down" to "Notice and Stay Down": Risks and Safeguards for Freedom of Expression' (2019) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3305153>. For trademarks and the copyright aspect, see Genç-Gelgeç (n 37).

That said, the established system cannot be considered complete, as some significant elements require further attention. Perhaps the most important one is that the established system does not entitle users to the right to defend their case before the hosting provider takes action. This might be done by enabling the user to issue a counter-notice that consists of all the elements required by an individual who claims the illegality of the content. This notice would be contained in the information of why the user claims that the concerned content is not illegal, and it should be substantiated with legal or contractual grounds as well as evidence if there is any. Granting such a right would undeniably reinforce the protection of users' fundamental rights that might be affected, such as the right to be heard and the right to receive appropriate information about the status of proceedings.¹⁰⁴ However, the DSA obliges hosting intermediaries to inform users and make available the redress possibilities to them only after the decision is taken.¹⁰⁵ From this it follows that users are granted the right to an effective remedy under the DSA but not the right to be heard before the decision is taken.

Regarding remedial possibilities, users are given the right to lodge their complaint against the decision taken by online platforms through internal complaint-handling systems that online platforms (excluding micro and small enterprises) are obliged to put in place. As stated above, further obligations are imposed on online platforms on the ground that they not only store information – as hosting intermediaries do – but also disseminate that information to the public. The obligation to put an internal complaint-handling system in place is one of these additional obligations. Some hosting intermediaries have already implemented such procedures,¹⁰⁶ although not as a legal obligation. These are implemented within their TCs. Therefore, there were no general standards to follow.

The DSA establishes the minimum requirements that online platforms fulfil in the operation of the mechanism under Article 17. Under that article, users, including individuals or entities that have submitted a notice, should be provided with an internal-complaint handling mechanism to lodge their complaints electronically. The mechanism would be available for them at least for six months after the decision is referred to them.¹⁰⁷ The article further establishes the same general standards as set for the notice and action mechanism, ie complaints must be dealt with in a non-discriminatory, timely, and non-arbitrary manner. If the complaint is based on sufficient information and evidence proving that the decision should be reversed, then the online platform must reverse its decision

¹⁰⁴ Giancarlo Frosio and Christophe Geiger, 'Taking Fundamental Rights Seriously in the Digital Services Act's Platform Liability Regime' (2022) *European Law Journal* (forthcoming), s III-3.

¹⁰⁵ Eifert and others claim that these procedural remedies hardly provide protection of the fundamental rights enshrined by the EU Charter. See Eifert and others (n 9) 1012.

¹⁰⁶ Such as Facebook's Oversight Board. See n 44.

¹⁰⁷ DSA, Art 17(1).

and inform the complainant accordingly without delay. In fact, including reversal decisions, online platforms are obliged to inform complainants about every decision taken concerning their complaint and the possibilities of redress, including out-of-court dispute resolution.

Notably, online platforms are required to ensure that qualified staff are included in the decision process so that the decision is not taken solely based on automated means. This appears reasonable since qualified human intervention in the decision process would likely eliminate wrong decisions. For example, a qualified person could differentiate a copyright infringement from fair use with the provided evidence. On the other hand, it would be challenging for online platforms to employ such qualified staff. Illegality may arise from the infringement of different substantive rights, ranging from defamation to trademarks. Online platforms should then employ suitable human resources to tackle various infringements. It is also evident from the aforementioned report provided by Facebook that full automation in content moderation technologies has not been as effective as hoped.¹⁰⁸ They should also benefit from human intervention in their content moderation and the mechanism related to tackling illegal content. Nevertheless, to what extent online platforms would comply with this requirement remains to be seen.

Even though users are only given the right to lodge their complaints after the decision is taken, these are still essential safeguards to protect users' fundamental rights. Moreover, users may still pursue out-of-court dispute settlement or other available redress possibilities regarding the decision taken, including complaints that could not be settled through the internal complaint-handling system of online platforms. Out-of-court dispute settlement bodies are determined and certified by the Digital Service Coordinators (DSCs),¹⁰⁹ whom each Member State appoints as an authority responsible for the supervision of intermediaries in each Member State. The DSA also sets out the conditions to be certified as an out-of-court dispute settlement body in Article 18. Although this is not directly within the scope of this paper, one of the conditions is worth mentioning. Article 18(2b) requires the settlement body to have 'the necessary expertise in relation to the issues arising in one or more particular areas of illegal content, or in relation to the application and enforcement of terms and conditions of one or more types of online platforms'. Although it remains to be seen how this is to be applied in practice by each Member State and concerning the different substantive rights at stake, this should ensure the effectiveness of the process and the remedy in principle. Besides, as out-of-court dispute settlement bodies are certified by the DSCs, having standardised bodies would have a positive impact

¹⁰⁸ See n 51. See also Antonio A Casilli and Julián Posada Gutiérrez, 'The Platformization of Labor and Society' in M Graham and WH Dutton (eds), *Society and the Internet. How Networks of Information and Communication are Changing Our Lives* (2nd edn, OUP 2019) 12 <<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01895137/document>> accessed 10 September 2022.

¹⁰⁹ DSA, Art 38.

on making the process uniform. On the other hand, the decisions held by these bodies are not binding, meaning that out-of-court dispute resolution is not the final remedy for users to apply. The dispute may always be brought to the court for judicial examination.¹¹⁰

Then, Article 18 sets out a rule on the costs of the process. If the decision is given in favour of the user,¹¹¹ the online platform bears the fees and reimburses the user. Otherwise, the user is not required to reimburse the fees or related expenses paid by an online platform unless it is held that it acted manifestly in bad faith. This rule incentivises users to apply for the remedy whilst making them refrain from lodging ungrounded and false claims before the body. In addition, online platforms are obliged to take measures to ensure notices submitted by trusted flaggers¹¹² are given priority by Article 19 and also obliged to apply certain measures set out in Article 20 to prevent misuse of the mechanisms, such as notice and action or internal complaint-handling systems. These articles reinforce the application and the framework of the mechanism.

Finally, Article 15(2)(a) should be mentioned with regard to the deficiencies of the established mechanism. This article permits hosting intermediaries to apply other measures to the illegal content. However, interpretation of the extent of different actions may give rise to fragmented applications. Hence, further guidance or safeguards should be provided on this.¹¹³ Similarly, the precise scope of some of the standards set in the DSA, such as diligence, should be determined as far as possible so as not to result in ambiguous implementation. Article 14 also requires intermediaries to conduct their decision process in a timely manner, but

¹¹⁰ DSA, Art 17(1)(1a).

¹¹¹ This includes the individual or entity that has submitted a notice.

¹¹² Trusted flaggers are private entities with special expertise in certain illegal content or activities; accordingly, they can issue notices regarding infringing activities relating to their expertise once their trusted flaggers status is confirmed. For a detailed assessment, see Savin (n 83) 9; Frosio and Geiger (n 104) s VI-1.

¹¹³ In fact, Member States implement different variants of notice mechanisms within their domestic laws in order to tackle illegal content online, although the ECD stipulates NTD mechanisms. For instance, one of the variants of a notice and action mechanism, the so-called notice and disconnection or the graduated response scheme, was implemented in France by the (repealed) HADOPI law for copyright infringements. This mechanism requires intermediaries or authorised administrative agencies to apply sanctions gradually – and the last one usually being the suspension of Internet access – after receiving a certain number of notifications. For a detailed examination, see Maria Frabboni, 'File Sharing and the Role of Intermediaries in the Marketplace: National, European Union and International Developments' in Irini A Stamatoudi (ed), *Copyright Enforcement and the Internet* (Kluwer Law International 2010) 119, 136–137; Andres Guadamuz, 'Developments in Intermediary Liability' in Andrej Savin and Jan Trzaskowski (eds), *Research Handbook on EU Internet Law* (Edward Elgar 2014) 312, 333–336.

there is nothing to assist intermediaries in determining what should be considered timely.¹¹⁴

3.3 Enforcement

Last but not least, the enforcement rules of the DSA should be considered. As will be shown, the DSA sets out a framework for enforcing the rules. This is important and needed, given that the DSA imposes obligations on digital platforms. So far, the paper has demonstrated that the above rules are promising in providing answers to the issues raised by the ECD. However, their desired effect can only be ensured with effective enforcement. The ECD does not provide enforcement rules, as this is left to the cooperation of the Member States and the codes of conduct at the EU level.¹¹⁵ Although this is compatible with the ECD's approach, it is difficult to conclude that it has impacted uniformity positively and hugely. The EU-level enforcement authority that would work with the Member States in implementing or enforcing the rules would have been assistive for effective enforcement.¹¹⁶

Fortunately, the DSA sets out enforcement rules and sanctions to urge providers to comply with the rules and obligations. The enforcement powers are distributed among different actors, mainly the DSCs and the European Commission. There is also the European Board of Digital Services (the Board), composed of the DSCs. However, the Board works as an advisory to the main enforcement actors: the DSCs and the Commission. The DSCs are appointed¹¹⁷ by each Member States as a competent authority. Their primary duty is to ensure coordination at the national level. Hence, they are responsible for supervision, intermediaries' compliance with the rules, and the consistency and effectiveness of the application of the rules.¹¹⁸ As the DSCs are considered responsible authorities of the Member States for matters related to the DSA and are required to carry out several tasks, Member States are required to appoint a DSC with sufficient technical, financial and human resources. To carry out their tasks, the DSCs are entitled to have both investigation and enforcement powers such as requiring information from providers, even making on-

¹¹⁴ There are two studies pointing out the existence of such fragmentation in the application of these standards. For example, one study concluded that the time frame for intermediaries to take action after receiving a notice ranges from three hours to ten days. See Sjoera Nas, 'The Multatuli Project ISP Notice & Take Down' (SANE, 1 October 2004) <<https://www-old.bof.nl/docs/researchpaperSANE.pdf>>. See also Christian Ahlert, Chris Marsden and Chester Yung, 'How 'Liberty' Disappeared from Cyberspace: The Mystery Shopper Tests Internet Content Self-Regulation' (2004) <https://www.academia.edu/686683/How_Liberty_Disappeared_from_Cyberspace_The_Mystery_Shopper_Tests_Internet_Content_Self_Regulation/>. For a detailed examination, see Genç-Gelgeç (n 37) 170–174.

¹¹⁵ ECD, Arts 16–20.

¹¹⁶ De Streel and Husovec (n 14) 18; De Streel and others (n 50) 81–82.

¹¹⁷ 'Within two months from the date of entry into force of this Regulation' according to the DSA Art 38(3).

¹¹⁸ DSA, Art 41.

site inspections of the premises in assessing their compliance with the rules or dealing with specific infringement and perhaps, more importantly, imposing fines when an intermediary fails to comply with the rules.¹¹⁹ The DSA puts a cap on the amount of penalties¹²⁰ to be imposed on intermediaries and leaves the Member States to set the standards for the fines and penalties.

On the other hand, regarding VLOPs and VLOSEs, the Commission is responsible for supervising and enforcing the rules concerning them. Hence, the Commission is vested with both investigation and enforcement powers.¹²¹ Some of the Commission's powers in this respect are as follows: conducting an assessment on the compliance of the due diligence obligations, including transparency obligations that are imposed on VLOPs and VLOSEs; taking necessary actions against the non-compliance¹²² and other matters found in the independent audits;¹²³ investigating suspected infringements¹²⁴ or requesting relevant information as to such infringements¹²⁵ or non-compliance and imposing fines and penalties.¹²⁶ However, VLOPs and VLOSEs must be given the right to be heard and to access the file before the Commission decides on non-compliance, fines and penalties.¹²⁷ It is also made clear that the Court of Justice has unlimited jurisdiction to review the Commission's decision on penalties and fines.¹²⁸

As briefly shown, the DSA establishes an enforcement regime that the ECD lacks. This is aimed to operate at the EU level. This should be welcomed as the enforcement rules appear to support the obligations. The distribution of powers and the encouragement of cooperation amongst them appear an important tool to avoid potential setbacks of centralised enforcement, such as long-delayed enforcement.¹²⁹ On the

¹¹⁹ DSA, Art 41.

¹²⁰ DSA, Art 42(3) establishes 'the maximum amount of penalties imposed for a failure to comply with the obligations laid down in this Regulation shall not exceed 6% of the annual worldwide turnover of the provider of intermediary services concerned. Penalties for the supply of incorrect, incomplete or misleading information, failure to reply or rectify incorrect, incomplete or misleading information and to submit to an on-site inspection shall not exceed 1% of the annual worldwide turnover of the provider concerned'. Then, Art 42(4) states 'the maximum amount of a periodic penalty payment shall be 5% of the average daily worldwide turnover or income of the provider of intermediary services concerned in the preceding financial year per day, calculated from the date specified in the decision concerned'.

¹²¹ DSA, Art 50.

¹²² DSA, Art 58.

¹²³ DSA, Art 28.

¹²⁴ DSA, Art 51.

¹²⁵ DSA, Arts 52–54.

¹²⁶ DSA, Art 59.

¹²⁷ DSA, Art 63.

¹²⁸ DSA, Art 64(a).

¹²⁹ With regard to the GDPR, see European Commission, 'Data protection as a pillar of citizens' empowerment and the EU's approach to the digital transition – two years of application of the General Data Protection Regulation' (Communication) COM(2020) 264 final.

other hand, the established system should be criticised for its potential ineffectiveness. The DSA prescribes that the DSCs must be technically and financially sufficient. Given that the DSCs' powers include carrying out investigations, identification of infringements and imposition of fines, they indeed should be capable of performing these tasks. However, this is easier said than done. This would require Member States to allocate human and financial resources. Concerning the GDPR, one report shows that the Member States hardly provided such resources and the Data Protection Authorities (DPAs)¹³⁰ are barely equipped with sufficient technical staff.¹³¹ One of them is the Irish DPA, responsible as lead authority for the compliance of some Big Tech companies (such as Google and Facebook) with the GDPR, although it receives more complaints than any other DPA. Unsurprisingly, it receives criticism for the lack of effective enforcement of the GDPR and data protection in general.¹³² This indicates the importance of providing resources for effective enforcement.

Given that this report was published two years after the GDPR came into effect, it offers illustrative facts for the DSA. The DSA requires Member States to establish their DSCs within fifteen months from its entry into force.¹³³ However, this would not necessarily mean that the supervision and enforcement of the rules will effectively take place accordingly. This would not happen unless the DSCs were provided with sufficient resources to perform their tasks. It is also possible that uneven resourcing might result in different levels of enforcement among the Member States. Moreover, the DSA requires the DSCs to cooperate and the Member States to make their technical staff available to the Commission for matters related to VLOPs and VLOSEs. This makes resourcing even more critical for fulfilling the objective of effective enforcement. It is hence vital to ensure effectiveness in the designation of the DSCs and to take lessons from the GDPR.

The power vested in the Commission concerning VLOPs and VLOSEs may also be criticised. Given that the non-compliance of VLOPs and VLOSEs might have a potential cross-border effect in the EU, this cen-

¹³⁰ Which are the responsible authorities of the compliance and supervision of the GDPR at national level.

¹³¹ Johnny Ryan and Alan Toner, 'Europe's Governments Are Failing the GDPR Brave's 2020 Report on the Enforcement Capacity of Data Protection Authorities' (*Brave*, April 2020) <<https://brave.com/static-assets/files/Brave-2020-DPA-Report.pdf>> accessed 10 September 2022. For example, the report reveals that 'only 6 national DPAs have more than 10 specialist tech investigation staff'; 'data protection authorities have 2 tech specialists or less'; 'half of all national DPAs receive small (€5 million or less) annual budgets from their governments'.

¹³² Madhumita Murgia and Javier Espinoza, 'Ireland Fails to Enforce EU Law against Big Tech' *Financial Times* (London, 13 September 2021) <www.ft.com/content/5b986586-0f85-47d5-8edb-3b49398e2b08> accessed 10 September 2022; Samuel Stolton, 'MEPs Rue Lack of GDPR Sanctions Issued by Irish Data Authority' (*Euractiv*, 26 March 2021) <www.euractiv.com/section/data-protection/news/meps-rue-lack-of-gdpr-sanctions-issued-by-irish-data-authority> accessed 10 September 2022.

¹³³ DSA, Art 38(3).

tralised-like approach might assist in more effective enforcement. That being said, the exclusive powers given to the Commission may put this body in a position different from the one it was originally assigned. As an executive arm of the EU, its principal role is to propose new laws and monitor their implementation. However, the DSA gives a central role to the Commission in enforcing the rules. This might create a conflict of interests as the Commission is the body that proposes the law and then imposes fines for non-compliance, which might indicate the deficiencies of the DSA that it itself proposed. This might also negatively impact the separation of EU powers.¹³⁴

Finally, it ought to be mentioned that the Commission's exclusive powers should be without prejudice to certain administrative tasks assigned to the DCSs.¹³⁵ Cooperation between the Commission, the Board, the DSCs and the Member States' competent authorities is encouraged by the DSA. These are assistive in ironing out the potential setbacks of enforcement and in ensuring effectiveness and unity in enforcement. That being said, how smoothly this could be applied in practice remains to be seen.

4 Conclusion

The task of this paper was to scrutinise the DSA to address whether it could iron out the deficits of the ECD. To do so, first the ECD's deficiencies were identified. Second, the rules established by the DSA were examined to answer the paper's question.

The ECD has been the law applicable to Internet intermediaries related to their liability for third-party content on their platform, electronic contracts and e-commerce activities for over twenty years. It was based on the objectives of facilitating the free movement of digital services within the EU and fostering innovation and e-commerce activities. To fulfil these objectives, a harmonised immunity regime was established for certain services of intermediaries, ie mere conduit, caching, and hosting. This means that the providers of these services might be granted immunity from liability arising from the infringing content made available by their users on their platform, provided that the conditions set out by the ECD in Articles 12–14 are met. These conditions are set out to assess the intermediaries' involvement in the availability of illegal content uploaded by their users. This is because the immunity is granted to an intermediary whose operation remains technical and passive as to the infringing content made available on its platform. This being the general framework of the ECD's immunity regime, most of the matters associated with this regime, such as procedures and conditions of the NTD mechanism, are

¹³⁴ Suzanne Vergnolle, 'Enforcement of the DSA and the DMA: What Did We Learn from the GDPR?' in Heiko Richter, Marlene Straub and Erik Tuchtfield (eds), *To Break Up or Regulate Big Tech? Avenues to Constrain Private Power in the DSA/DMA Package* (2021) Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition Research Paper No 21-25, 103, 107.

¹³⁵ DSA, Art 84(b).

left for the Member States to deal with under their national law. The Member States are provided with further insight into applying the rules either when the matters were referred to the ECJ or when the EU Commission publishes the codes of conduct or additional communications.

The above appraisal indicates that the most challenging issues of the ECD are the lack of harmonisation and the discretion given to the intermediaries. Concerning the lack of harmonisation, the fragmentation primarily arises from the interpretation of the rules concerning hosting intermediaries, the implementation and the application of the NTD mechanism, and the prohibition of the general monitoring obligation. Regarding the conditions established for hosting intermediaries, the ECJ sets out a neutrality test for courts to apply in distinguishing active intermediaries from passive ones. However, the application of this test has not been straightforward in practice. Hence, it has led to divergent applications.¹³⁶ Moreover, the test was not assessed by the ECJ concerning today's extensive content moderation technologies, so the application of the test to these remains open to divergent applications. Besides, the application of the NTD mechanism has proven to be challenging in providing harmonisation, as each Member State establishes the standards and elements of the NTD systems within their corresponding national law. The rules on this have been heavily fragmented.¹³⁷ In the same vein, the interpretation of the prohibition of the general monitoring obligation has been divergent among the EU Member States.

Another setback of the ECD's framework is the discretion given to hosting intermediaries. As demonstrated, hosting intermediaries are provided with powers similar to a judge in dealing with illegal content. As the ECD requires the hosting intermediary to act against illegal content made available on its platform, it puts the hosting intermediary in the position of a judge. When the notice is received as to the illegality of content, the intermediary assesses the notice and claim and then decides whether or not to take down the content. The ECD does not establish rules, standards or safeguards for intermediaries to follow in this respect. Hence, the rules and procedures have been formed by intermediaries' TCs and through the application of their self-implemented mechanisms. In default of any transparency rules, matters related to the moderation procedures, such as how they act against the illegal content and how they apply their mechanisms, are left under their control and discretion. This strengthens the intermediaries' position within the digital world as they may act almost like a lawmaker. More crucially, the protection of fundamental rights is also left to intermediaries. As shown, the application of NTD directly impacts on the parties' fundamental rights. The ECD leaves the task of protecting and balancing the rights at stake to intermediaries

¹³⁶ De Streel and Husovec (n 14) 42.

¹³⁷ Commission, Online Services, Including e-Commerce, in the Single Market Accompanying the document Communication on 'A coherent framework to boost confidence in the Digital Single Market of e-commerce and other online services' SEC(2011) 1641 final 3.4.4.

– which are private parties – without providing any safeguards.

After identifying these as the deficiencies of the ECD's framework, this paper examined the DSA. In light of this, the very first thing to conclude is that the DSA appears to target matters related to which the ECD fell short. Therefore, it should be welcomed.

First, the DSA's adopted approach to regulating intermediaries appears appropriate to fulfil its objectives. Its main aim is to ensure the adequate functioning of digital services within the EU by striking a balance between the powers and responsibilities of intermediaries of different sizes and by protecting the fundamental rights of all parties. To fulfil these tasks, attention is placed on digital services, especially on Big Tech companies and their infrastructural advantages. Therefore, new sets of due diligence obligations are imposed on them. These rules are established depending on the size and roles of the intermediaries within the online world. Accordingly, the providers of digital services are classified into four categories: intermediaries, hosting intermediaries including online platforms, online platforms, and VLOPs and VLOSEs. This is an important change in the legal framework, and it is promising one to strike a balance between the different sizes of digital services.

Second, the DSA establishes much-needed rules for notice and action mechanisms. Hosting intermediaries must implement notice and action mechanisms in their systems by the DSA. In line with this, they are provided with minimum standards for the mechanism, such as the system's specifications or what constitutes a valid notice. They are obliged to support their decision regarding the claim with a statement of reasons, including the legal grounds, of why the specific decision is taken, the duration and territorial scope of the decision, etc. The notice issuer should also be provided with information on the possibilities of redress. Furthermore, online platforms are required to implement internal-complaint handling systems and make available out-of-court dispute resolution mechanisms. The standards related to these are also established to some extent. Furthermore, hosting intermediaries, online platforms and VLOPs are required to comply with different levels of transparency and information obligations concerning the notice and action mechanism. These obligations play a significant role in setting the standards in the application of the rules, eliminating intermediaries' discretion in applying enforcement mechanisms, and striking a balance between the parties' fundamental rights.

Third, the DSA establishes detailed and tiered reporting and transparency obligations. This is significant as the lack of transparency is identified as one of the deficiencies of the ECD that leads to fragmentation and unfair applications. The DSA requires all digital platforms to have transparency reports and sets the standards for them. The level of obligations is increased for online platforms and VLOPs. They are also obliged to ensure transparency in their advertisements. These moves ap-

pear promising in establishing a more uniform and fairer framework and limiting intermediaries' discretion on the application of content moderation.

Last but not least, the DSA creates an enforcement regime that the ECD lacks. This means that the obligations are supported by enforcement rules, although their effectiveness can be criticised. The decentralised approach of the enforcement mechanism distributes enforcement and investigation powers through the DSCs and the European Commission. There is also the Board which works as an advisory to them. The DSCs are appointed by the Member States and are made responsible for coordination at the national level, while the Commission is vested with enforcement powers as to the VLOPs and VLOSEs. As shown, both are empowered to impose fines and penalties in the case of non-compliance.

As a concluding remark, it should be underlined that the DSA cannot be considered complete, although its framework appears full of promise. As indicated, some issues require further attention. Although these are not discussed in detail here, they should be recalled. Starting with the established notice and action mechanism, the DSA misses an opportunity to entitle the user to issue a counter-notice which would ensure the protection of and balance between the fundamental rights of the parties. As addressed, users are given the right to lodge their claim only after an intermediary takes the decision. As far as the immunity rules are concerned, the DSA also appears to fail to clarify the application of the neutrality standard. The DSA, like its predecessor, does not take account of new technologies and the content moderation activities of intermediaries in relation to the immunity regime. Despite the evident interrelation between the application of the immunity rules and the obligations imposed, the opportunity to come up with a more complete and straightforward immunity regime appears not to have been seized. Clarification on the interpretation of standards, such as general monitoring and diligence, may also be needed for uniformity. As for the due diligence obligations, it is doubted how many of them will be embraced by digital platforms. The enforcement regime is established, but questions about its effectiveness are also raised. How effectively this will work and if the DSA can deliver the promise of a new regime may only be seen after the rules come into force and are applied in practice.



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IS THE ESSENTIAL FACILITIES DOCTRINE FIT FOR ACCESS TO DATA CASES? THE DATA PROTECTION ASPECT

Rok Dacar*

Abstract: Personal data can be of great economic value for companies as it is an essential input for the offering of a wide array of services. One way for a company to obtain access to essential personal data controlled by another company is by demanding mandatory access on the grounds of the essential facilities doctrine. Such access, however, can violate the right to the protection of personal data of the data subjects if it is not based on one of the legitimate grounds for the processing of personal data set by the GDPR. Two of these grounds are especially likely to be applicable to the access to personal data mandated using the essential facilities doctrine: the interpretation of the Commission decision or the judgment of the Court of Justice ordering the granting of access as a legal obligation and the legitimate interest of the company requesting access, for such access. The anonymisation of personal data is not a viable option for the circumvention of the rules of the GDPR as anonymised personal data loses most of its economic relevance for companies.

Keywords: essential facilities doctrine, right to protection of personal data, grounds for processing personal data, anonymisation of personal data, General Data Protection Regulation.

1 Introduction

Access to competitively relevant data is crucial for companies to compete successfully on today's markets. The importance of such data goes far beyond the ICT sector as data is becoming one of the most important inputs even in traditional, so-called bricks and mortar, sectors (eg mobility, construction, banking, etc). However, one must not overlook that a company's access to personal data controlled by another company might not only increase its competitive potential but also cause widespread violations of fundamental rights of the individuals that the data refers to (data subjects). One of the means for a company to obtain competitively relevant data is by use of one of the most controversial instruments of competition law, the essential facilities doctrine. This paper will explore the possible clash between the obligation of a company to grant access

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to the essential personal data it controls and its obligation not to violate the right to the protection of personal data of the data subjects. All this with the aim of answering the research question *whether the current data protection regime in the EU allows for personal data to be shared as essential facilities under the essential facilities doctrine and, if so, under what conditions*.

The paper is divided into four main parts. The first clarifies the basic concepts and institutes necessary for understanding data protection concerns related to the (mandatory) sharing of personal data. It analyses (i) the genesis, nature, and current status of the (fundamental) right to protection of personal data while taking special note of its double-faceted nature; (ii) the genesis of the essential facilities doctrine and the possibility of data being an essential facility; (iii) the difference between personal and non-personal data and some of the difficulties connected with the distinction of the two categories of data; and lastly (iv) the relationship between competition law and data protection. In the second part, the paper analyses under what grounds for the processing of personal data as stated by the General Data Protection Regulation (hereinafter: GDPR)¹ could personal data be shared under the essential facilities doctrine without such sharing constituting a violation of the data protection regime. It is concluded that it could be possible for personal data to be shared under the essential facilities doctrine on two grounds: (i) either a Commission decision or Court² judgment ordering the mandatory sharing of personal data which could be interpreted as a legal obligation; or (ii) the company requesting access to personal data could prove it has a legitimate interest to access that data which outweighs the interest of the data subjects for the protection of their personal data. The third part of the paper explores the possibility of personal data being transformed into non-personal data and shared as such. As the rules of the GDPR only apply to personal data, its effective transformation into non-personal data means that the data protection rules no longer apply. There are, however, two limits to such circumvention of the GDPR. Firstly, there is always the possibility of non-personal data being transformed back into personal data through the use of advanced analytics. Secondly, the anonymisation of personal data voids them of most of their commercial value. The fourth and last part of the paper summarises the findings of this study and attempts to present a holistic answer to the research question above.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC [2016] OJ L119/1 (hereinafter: GDPR).

² The term Court is used to describe both the Court of Justice of the European Union as well as the General Court of the European Union.

2 Setting the scene

2.1 The right to protection of personal data

‘The right to protection of personal data is a young fundamental right that in a very short time became one of the core values of EU law’.³ It is enshrined in Article 8 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (hereinafter: the Charter)⁴ as well as in Article 16(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.⁵ The right to protection of personal data is operationalised by the GDPR,⁶ a successor of Directive 95/46,⁷ introducing detailed provisions on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and rules relating to the free movement of personal data.⁸ The right to protection of personal data was created through the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter: ECtHR), where it was first considered only as an informational dimension of the right to respect of personal and family life but later gained the nature of an independent fundamental right, protected through the provisions of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to respect for private and family life),⁹ while still being tightly connected with the right to respect of personal and family life. From the ECtHR’s case law, it was transplanted into EU law, being recognised as a fundamental right in the Court’s *Promusicae*¹⁰ judgment in 2008 and given the nature of an independent fundamental right in the Charter. The close connection between the right to protection of personal data and the right to private and family life is clearly visible from the Court’s judgments regarding the right to protection of personal data as they take into

³ Maja Brkan, ‘The Unstoppable Expansion of the EU Fundamental Right to Data Protection’ (2016) 23(5) Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law 812, 813.

⁴ Art 8 of the Charter states that:

‘1. Everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her.
2. Such data must be processed fairly for specified purposes and on the basis of the consent of the person concerned or some other legitimate basis laid down by law. Everyone has the right of access to data which has been collected concerning him or her, and the right to have it rectified.
3. Compliance with these rules shall be subject to control by an independent authority’.

⁵ Stating that everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning them.

⁶ The GDPR confirms that the right to protection of personal data is a fundamental right. Recital 1 states that: ‘The protection of natural persons in relation to the processing of personal data is a fundamental right. Article 8(1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (the ‘Charter’) and Article 16(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provide that everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her’.

⁷ Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data [1995] OJ L281.

⁸ The GDPR, Art 1.

⁹ Gloria González Fuster, *The Emergence of Personal Data as a Fundamental Right of the EU* (Springer 2014) 214.

¹⁰ Case C-275/06 *Productores de Música España (Promusicae)* ECLI:EU:C:2008:54.

consideration the provisions of both Article 7 (respect for private and family life) and Article 8 (right to protection of personal data) of the Charter, which is clearly visible in the *Scheke and Eifert*,¹¹ *Schwarz*,¹² and *Digital Rights Ireland*¹³ cases. The specificity of the right to protection of personal data is that it has a double-faceted character: it is a fundamental right while it also pursues goals of an economic nature.¹⁴

2.2 The essential facilities doctrine

According to the essential facilities doctrine, the owner of a facility which is not replicable by the ordinary process of innovation and investment, and without access to which competition on a market is impossible or seriously impeded, has to share it with a rival.^{15,16} Essential facility

¹¹ Joined Cases C-92/08 and C-93/09 *Volker und Markus Schecke and Eifert* ECLI:EU:C:2010:662 state in para 64 that: 'the publication of data by name relating to the beneficiaries concerned and the precise amounts received by them from the EAGF and the EAFRD constitutes an interference, as regards those beneficiaries, with the rights recognised by Articles 7 and 8 of the Charter' (emphasis added).

¹² Case C-291/12 *Schwarz v Stadt Bochum* ECLI:EU:C:2013:670, paras 33, 39, 46, etc.

¹³ Case C-293/12 *Digital Rights Ireland and Seitlinger and others* ECLI:EU:C:2014:238, paras 38–72.

¹⁴ Case C-518/07 *Commission v Federal Republic of Germany* ECLI:EU:C:2010:125 states in para 30 that 'the supervisory authorities responsible for supervising the processing of personal data outside the public sector must enjoy an independence allowing them to perform their duties free from external influence. That independence precludes not only any influence exercised by the supervised bodies, but also any directions or any other external influence, whether direct or indirect, which could call into question the performance by those authorities of their task consisting of establishing a *fair balance between the protection of the right to private life and the free movement of personal data*' (emphasis added); while Case C-582/14 *Patrick Breyer v Federal Republic of Germany* ECLI:EU:C:2016:779 states in para 58 that: 'Article 5 of Directive 95/46 authorises Member States to specify, within the limits of Chapter II of that directive and, accordingly, Article 7 thereof, the conditions under which the processing of personal data is lawful, the margin of discretion which Member States have pursuant to Article 5 can therefore be used only in accordance with the objective pursued by that directive of maintaining a *balance between the free movement of personal data and the protection of private life*' (emphasis added); furthermore, recital 2 of the GDPR inter alia states that: 'This Regulation is intended to contribute to the accomplishment of an area of freedom, security and justice and of an *economic union, to economic and social progress, to the strengthening and the convergence of the economies within the internal market, and to the well-being of natural persons*' (emphasis added); the GDPR also states in Art 1(3) that: 'The free movement of personal data within the Union shall be neither restricted nor prohibited for reasons connected with the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data'.

¹⁵ Grainne de Burca and Paul Craig, *EU Law* (6th edn, OUP 2015) 1074.

¹⁶ For a more in-depth analysis of the essential facilities doctrine, see Sebastien J Evrard, 'Essential Facilities, Bronner and Beyond' (2004) 10(3) *Columbia Journal of European Law* 491; Marina Lao, 'Networks, Access and "Essential Facilities": From Terminal Railroad to Microsoft' (2009) 62(2) *SMU Law Review* 557; Marina Lao, 'Search, Essential Facilities, and the Antitrust Duty to Deal' (2013) 11(5) *Northwestern Journal of Technology and Intellectual Property* 275; Devdatta Malshe, 'Essential Facilities: de facto; de jure' (2019) 40(3) *European Competition Law Review* 124; Axel Beckmerhagen, *Die essential facilities doctrine im US-amerikanischen und europäischen Kartellrecht* (Nomos 2002); Ulf Müller and Anselm Rodenhausen, 'The Rise and Fall of the Essential Facility Doctrine' (2008) 29(5) *European Competition Law Review* 310.

cases are special types of refusal to sell/refusal to deal cases in which two relevant markets have to be defined: the upstream market and the downstream market. For the essential facilities doctrine to be used, a company with a dominant position on the upstream market must refuse to grant access to a product or service from this market that is necessary to compete on the downstream market (it is an essential facility or essential input) to a company requesting it. The essential facilities doctrine was first conceived by the United States Supreme Court in the famous *Terminal Railroad Combination* case of 1912. The doctrine was developed further by both the Supreme Court and lower, especially federal, courts. In the 1960s and 1970s, it came under heavy fire from anti-interventionist schools of economic and legal thought, one of the most famous critiques being Philip Areeda's article 'Essential Facilities: An Epithet in Need of Limiting Principles'. The Supreme Court's judgment in the *Trinko*¹⁷ case in 2004, with justice Scalia stating that the Supreme Court has never recognised such a doctrine, and thus finds no need either to recognise it or to repudiate it, was the final nail in the coffin for the doctrine in the United States legal system, limiting its use to such an extent as to make it obsolete.

In the EU, however, due to the strong presence of German ordoliberal economic thought, the essential facilities doctrine received far less criticism and was widely used by the European Commission and the Court, especially from the 1980s to the early 2000s. The Commission and the Court applied the essential facilities doctrine in a large number of cases concerning, inter alia, chemicals needed to produce other chemicals (*Commercial Solvents*),¹⁸ port infrastructure (*B&I/Sealink*,¹⁹ *Port of Rødby*),²⁰ services needed for the functioning of airports (*Flughafen Frankfurt/Main AG*,²¹ *Alpha Flight Services/Aéroports de Paris*),²² railroads, trains and train staff (*Night Services*),²³ as well as intellectual property rights (*Volvo v*

¹⁷ *Verizon Commc'ns, Inc v Law Offices of Curtis V Trinko, LLP*, 540 US 398, 410-411 (2004).

¹⁸ Case C-6/73 *Istituto Chemioterapico Italiano and Commercial Solvents v Commission* ECLI:EU:C:1974:18.

¹⁹ *B&I/Sealink* (Case IV/34.689) Commission Decision 94/19/EC [1994] OJ L15/8.

²⁰ *Port of Rødby* Commission Decision 94/119/EC [1993] OJ L55/52.

²¹ *Flughafen Frankfurt/Main AG* (Case IV/34.801) Commission Decision 98/190/EC [1998] OJ L72/30.

²² *Alpha Flight Services/Aéroports de Paris* (Case IV/35.613) Commission Decision 98/513/EC [1998] OJ L230/10.

²³ Case T-374/94 *European Night Services Ltd v Commission* ECLI:EU:T:1998:198.

Veng,²⁴ *Renault v Maxicar*,²⁵ *Magill*,²⁶ *IMS Health*,²⁷ *Microsoft*.²⁸

After the heavily criticised²⁹ *Microsoft* judgment that caused considerable uncertainty about the conditions in which the essential facilities doctrine can be used, both the Commission and the Court showed great reticence towards its application. It is not surprising, then, that the Commission avoided voicing its opinion about the possibility of data being an essential facility despite having several chances to do so, namely in the *Facebook/WhatsApp*,³⁰ *Google/DoubleClick*,³¹ *Telefónica UK/Vodafone UK/Everything Everywhere/JV*³² cases. Rather than taking a clear stance on the matter, the Commission pointed out that even if one company controls a certain dataset, there is still a large pool of data available for other companies to use and that the use of a certain dataset by one company does not restrain other companies from using this same dataset, as the nature of data is non-rivalrous.³³ While this is true, there can also be cases in which data that another company needs access to, to compete on the downstream market, is in the exclusive control of another company and consequently constitutes an essential facility. Notable examples of such cases are the (i) *GDF Suez*³⁴ case from France and the (ii) *hiQ Labs*³⁵ and (iii) *PeopleBrowsr*³⁶ cases from the USA.

(i) GDF Suez (now Engie) is a French vertically integrated energy company that had a legal monopoly on the distribution of electricity and gas before liberalisation of the sector. The monopoly enabled GDF Suez to create a database containing personal data of its customers. Direct Energie, a competitor of GDF Suez, demanded access to some of the personal data (names, addresses, information about the consumption of gas and phone numbers) included in the database. The French Competition Protection Authority (Autorité de la concurrence) ordered GDF Suez to share the requested data with Direct Energie and to send a letter to the

²⁴ Case C-238/87 *AB Volvo v Erik Veng* (UK) ECLI:EU:C:1988:477.

²⁵ Case C-38/98 *Régie nationale des usines Renault SA v Maxicar SpA and Orazio Formento* ECLI:EU:C:2000:225.

²⁶ Case C-241/91 P, C-242/91 P *Radio Telefís Éireann (RTE) and Independent Television Publications Ltd (ITP) v Commission* ECLI:EU:C:1995:98.

²⁷ Case C-418/01 *IMS Health GmbH & Co OHG v NDC Health GmbH & Co KG* ECLI:EU:C:2004:257.

²⁸ Case T-201/04 *Microsoft v Commission* ECLI:EU:T:2007:289.

²⁹ One of the most pertinent critiques being Renata B Hesse, 'Counselling Clients on Refusal to Supply Issues in the Wake of the EC Microsoft Case' (2008) 22(2) *Antitrust* 32.

³⁰ *Facebook/WhatsApp* (Case COMP/M.7217) (2014).

³¹ *Google/DoubleClick* (Case COMP/M.4731) [2008] OJ C184/9.

³² *Telefónica UK/Vodafone UK/ Everything Everywhere/ JV* (Case COMP/M.6314) (2012).

³³ Bruno Lasserre and Andreas Mundt 'Competition Law and Big Data: The Enforcers' View' (2017) 1(4) *Rivista Italiana di Antitrust* 87, 97.

³⁴ Decision of the Autorité de la concurrence GDF Suez 14-MC-02, Judgment of the Appellate Court no 2014/19335 and of the Cassation Court no 31 F-D.

³⁵ *hiQ Labs, Inc v LinkedIn Corp*, 938 F.3d 985 (9th Cir 2019).

³⁶ *PeopleBrowsr, Inc v Twitter, Inc*, Case No. 3:12-cv-06120-EMC.

customers whose personal data was about to be shared, informing them that they can deny the consent for their data to be shared by filling out a special form and sending it to GDF Suez. Should they not send such a letter, consent would be presumed. It is important to note that the decision was passed before the coming into force of the GDPR, according to which 'silence, pre-ticked boxes or inactivity should not constitute consent'.

(ii) HiQ Labs was using publicly available LinkedIn data to prepare a statistical analysis of different workforce trends. LinkedIn prohibited hiQ Labs from further using its data, thereby refusing them access to an essential input. After an appeal to the Supreme Court, the case was referred back to the Ninth Circuit Court.

(iii) PeopleBrowsr was using publicly available Twitter data to analyse the attitude of users towards different products and influencers. Similar to the *hiQ Labs* case, Twitter barred PeopleBrowsr from using the essential data. The case was resolved with a settlement granting PeopleBrowsr access to Twitter data for an additional limited amount of time.

Furthermore, the tenth amendment to the German Act against Restraints of Competition (*Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen*)³⁷ introduced the provision of Article 19(4) explicitly stating that data can be an essential facility.³⁸ We can therefore conclude that despite the fact that neither the Commission nor the Court has considered data as an essential facility up to this point, data can still be an essential facility. The exact conditions that must be fulfilled for data to be an essential facility will not be further analysed as this is not the aim of this paper. Its aim is rather to clarify under what conditions obligatory sharing of personal information does not infringe the right to the protection of personal information.

Data, and especially big data, has several characteristics that distinguish it from traditional materialised and immaterialised (essential) facilities: its decreasing marginal value,³⁹ decreasing value over time,⁴⁰ in some cases its non-rivalrous nature,⁴¹ and the extreme network effects

³⁷ Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen in der Fassung der Bekanntmachung vom 26. Juni 2013 (BGBl. I S.1750, 3245), das zuletzt durch Artikel 4 des Gesetzes vom 20. Mai 2022 (BGBl. I S. 730) geändert worden ist (2013 Act against Restraints of Competition (FRG)).

³⁸ The provision states that: 'An abuse exists in particular if a dominant undertaking as a supplier or purchaser of a certain type of goods or commercial services refuses to supply another undertaking with such a good or commercial service for adequate consideration, in particular to grant it access to data, networks or other infrastructure facilities, and if the supply or the granting of access is objectively necessary in order to operate on an upstream or downstream market'.

³⁹ The more data a company controls the smaller is the economic value of any additional quantity of data.

⁴⁰ Data is especially relevant when 'fresh'. The more time that passes from the collection of data, the smaller is its economic value due to market changes.

⁴¹ In general, the use of a certain dataset by one company does not exclude other companies from using the same dataset as well.

present in data-related industries.⁴² Taking account of these specificities, two distinct schools regarding the possible nature of data as an essential facility have developed. The first argues that data can never be an essential facility⁴³ while the second defends the position that data can and even should be an essential facility if certain conditions are met, as a refusal to grant access to data can have the same effects for competition on a downstream market as refusal to grant access to a traditional facility.⁴⁴ One could argue that the uncertainties in academia regarding the possible nature of data as an essential facility ended with the tenth amendment of the German Act against Restraints of Competition (*Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen*)⁴⁵ that recognises the possible nature of data as an essential facility.⁴⁶

Access to relevant data can be of vital importance for companies, as it is impossible to offer some services without relevant data (data is an essential input). Given that the vast majority of economically relevant data is controlled by a handful of large companies, the so-called FAANG (Facebook (now META), Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google (now Alphabet)) companies and some other international corporations, it can be difficult for smaller companies to obtain relevant data, especially due to the prohibitively large investments needed for setting up an efficient data collection and analysis operation. Currently, access to only very limited categories of data, for example auto-diagnostics⁴⁷ and some electricity consumption data,⁴⁸ is subject to ex ante regulation in the EU. Conse-

⁴² See *Google Search (Shopping)* (Case AT.40099) Commission Decision AT.39740 [2018] OJ C9, para 287, 319.

⁴³ Erika Douglas, 'Monopolization Remedies and Data Privacy' (2020) 24(1) *Virginia Journal of Law and Technology* 1; Zachary Abrahamson, 'Essential Data' (2014) 124(3) *Yale Law Journal* 867.

⁴⁴ Édouard Bruc, 'Data as an Essential Facility in European Law: How to Define the "Target" Market and Divert the Data Pipeline' (2019) 15(2/3) *European Competition Journal* 177.

⁴⁵ 2013 Act against Restraints of Competition (*Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen*) (FRG).

⁴⁶ Art 18/III/3 states that '(3) In assessing the market position of an undertaking in relation to its competitors, account shall be taken in particular of the following ... its access to data relevant for competition'. Art 19/II/4 states that '(2) An abuse exists in particular if a dominant undertaking as a supplier or purchaser of a certain type of goods or commercial services. ... 4. refuses to supply another undertaking with such a good or commercial service for adequate consideration, in particular to grant it access to data, networks or other infrastructure facilities, and if the supply or the granting of access is objectively necessary in order to operate on an upstream or downstream market and the refusal threatens to eliminate effective competition on that market, unless there is an objective justification for the refusal'.

⁴⁷ Directive 2007/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 September 2007 establishing a framework for the approval of motor vehicles and their trailers, and of systems, components and separate technical units intended for such vehicles [2007] OJ L 263.

⁴⁸ Directive (EU) 2019/944 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on common rules for the internal market for electricity and amending Directive 2012/27/EU (recast) [2019] OJ L158.

quently, the only available tool for gaining access to the vast majority of economically relevant data that the company controlling it does not want to share is the use of the doctrine. This might, however, change with the adoption of the proposed Digital Markets Act (DMA) which, *inter alia*, states that gatekeepers are to 'provide business users, or third parties authorised by a business user, free of charge, with effective, high-quality, continuous and real-time access and use of aggregated or non-aggregated data, that is provided for or generated in the context of the use of the relevant core platform services ...',⁴⁹ as well as the proposed Data Act.^{50,51}

2.3 The relation between competition law and data protection law

The relation between competition law and data protection law is largely shaped by the Court's *Asnef-Equifax*⁵² judgment in which it stated that 'any possible issues relating to the sensitivity of personal data are not, *as such*, a matter for competition law, they may be resolved on the basis of the relevant provisions governing data protection'.⁵³ The Commission followed this position in the *Facebook/WhatsApp* and *Google/DoubleClick* merger decisions in which it, *inter alia*, stated that 'any privacy-related concerns flowing from the increased concentration of data within the control of Facebook as a result of the Transaction do not fall within the scope of the EU competition law rules but within the scope of the EU data protection rules'.⁵⁴ Despite some authors arguing that the Court has taken a clear position that questions related to the protection of personal data are not relevant for competition law under any circumstances,⁵⁵ its position is in fact much more moderate than might seem on first sight. The phrase '*as such*' used by the Court in the *Asnef-Equifax* judgment means that questions related to the protection of personal information are not relevant in competition law assessments only if they apply solely to the protection of personal information. As soon as the protection of personal information has any impact on competition law or market competition, it can, consequently, be considered in competition law assessments. Such an interpretation of the *Asnef-Equifax* judgment is in line with the institution's position in some other cases where it used competition law

⁴⁹ Proposal for a regulation of the European parliament and of the Council on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector (Digital Markets Act) COM/2020/842 final, Art 6(i).

⁵⁰ Proposal for a regulation of the European parliament and of the Council on harmonised rules on fair access to and use of data (Data Act) COM/2022/68 final.

⁵¹ For a more detailed analysis of the Data Act proposal, see Clément Perarnaud and Rosanna Fann, 'The EU Data Act: Towards a New European Data Revolution?' (CEPS, 4 March 2022) <https://www.ceps.eu/download/publication/?id=35693&pdf=CEPS-PI2022-05_The-EU-Data-Act.pdf> accessed 10 September 2022.

⁵² Case C-238/05 *Asnef-Equifax* ECLI:EU:C:2006:734.

⁵³ *ibid*, para 63.

⁵⁴ *Google/DoubleClick*, para 164.

⁵⁵ Charlotte Breuvar, Étienne Chassing and Anne-Sophie Perraut, 'Big Data and Competition Law in the Digital Sector: Lessons from the European Commission's Merger Control Practice and Recent National Initiatives' (2016) no 3, *Concurrences – revue des droits de la concurrence*, 51.

instruments to address certain goals that were not directly connected with market efficiency or even impacted it negatively.⁵⁶ An example is the Commission's *EMI/Universal*⁵⁷ merger decision that required Universal to make strict commitments meant to prevent the endangerment of cultural diversity protected through Article 167 TFEU. Given the Court's position regarding the relation between competition law and data protection, there is no hindrance to take data protection considerations into account when using the doctrine to mandate obligatory access to personal data, all the more so as the protection of personal information is a fundamental right.

A position favouring a much closer connection between competition law and data protection law was taken by the German Competition Authority (Bundeskartellamt (BKA)) in its recent decision in the *Facebook* case.⁵⁸ According to the BKA, Facebook abused its dominant position on the market for social networks by forcing its users to accept terms of service that infringed their right to the protection of personal information and their right to informational self-determination, as they had to comply with those terms (and thus allowing Facebook to collect a large amount of data produced by them online, even when not using Facebook) if they wished to use Facebook's services, for which there were no actual or potential substitutes available. The decision was later overturned by the national judiciary and the case was referred to the Court for a preliminary ruling. In the author's opinion, the Court will not stray from the position established in its *Asnef-Equifax* judgment and will thus not follow the revolutionary reasoning of the BKA.⁵⁹

2.4 The distinction between personal and non-personal data

As possible violations of the right to the protection of personal data can only arise from the misuse of personal data, we must distinguish between personal and non-personal data. The GDPR defines personal data as

any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Maria Wasastjerna, *Competition, Data and Privacy in the Digital Economy: Towards a Privacy Dimension in Competition Policy?* (Wolters Kluwer 2020) 57.

⁵⁷ *Universal Music Group/EMI Music* (Case COMP/M.6458) (2012).

⁵⁸ Bundeskartellamt case no B6-22/16.

⁵⁹ For more on the Facebook case, see Klaus Wiedemann, 'A Matter of Choice: The German Federal Supreme Court's Interim Decision in the Abuse-of-Dominance Proceedings Bundeskartellamt v Facebook (Case KVR 69/19)' (2020) 51(9) *International Intellectual Property and Competition Law* 1168; Anne Witt, 'Excessive Data Collection as a Form of Anticompetitive Conduct: The German Facebook Case' (2021) 66(2) *Antitrust Bulletin* 276.

⁶⁰ GDPR, Art 4(1).

If such data is processed wholly or partly by automated means, the rules of the GDPR apply, with the term 'processing' also covering the disclosure by transmission of personal data from one company to another.⁶¹ As sharing of personal data mandated by the essential facilities doctrine represents disclosure by transmission, it constitutes processing of personal data and must be in accordance with the provisions of the GDPR.

The definition of non-personal data is a negative one, meaning that all data that does not meet the requirements of the above definition is non-personal data. However, the line between personal and non-personal data is not always clear cut and the distinction between the two categories of data is therefore artificial to a certain extent. This is especially true as the constant technological advances in data analytics can lead to the combination and analysis of two different datasets containing non-personal data to produce personal data.⁶² The Court has developed a wide body of case law regarding the distinction between personal and non-personal data. In the *Breyer*⁶³ case, the question arose about whether a log of accesses to the websites of the German government, containing the IP addresses of the computers from which the websites were visited, constituted personal data. While the log did contain the IP addresses, it was not possible to identify the individuals who visited the websites without the assistance of the Web Service Provider which was able to link the IP addresses to individuals.⁶⁴ The Court noted that 'the fact that the additional data necessary to identify the user of a website are held not by the online media services provider, but by that user's internet service provider does not appear to be such as to exclude that dynamic IP addresses registered by the online media services provider constitute personal data within the meaning of Article 2(a) of Directive 95/46,'⁶⁵ thereby confirming that the data in question indeed constituted personal data. Some time later in the *Nowak*⁶⁶ case, the Court concluded that the handwritten exam sheets by an examination candidate may constitute personal data. The *Nowak* case importantly confirmed that the use of the expression 'any information' in the definition of the concept of 'personal data', in Article 2(a) of Directive 95/46, reflects the aim of the EU legislature to assign a wide scope to that concept, which is not restricted to information that is sensitive or private, but potentially encompasses all kinds of information, not only objective

⁶¹ Art 4(2) GDPR states that 'processing is any operation or set of operations which is performed on personal data or on sets of personal data, whether or not by automated means, such as collection, recording, organisation, structuring, storage, adaptation or alteration, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure by transmission, dissemination or otherwise making available, alignment or combination, restriction, erasure or destruction'.

⁶² Thomas Tombal, 'Economic Dependence and Data Access' (2020) 51(1) International Review of Intellectual Property and Competition Law 70, 90.

⁶³ Case C-582/14 *Breyer v Federal Republic of Germany* ECLI:EU:C:2016:779.

⁶⁴ Cristopher Docksey and Hielke Hijmans, 'The Court of Justice as a Key Player in Privacy and Data Protection: An Overview of Recent Trends in Case Law at the Start of a New Era of Data Protection Law' (2019) 5(3) European Data Protection Law Review 300, 302-303.

⁶⁵ Case C-582/14 *Breyer v Federal Republic of Germany* ECLI:EU:C:2016:779, para 44.

⁶⁶ Case C-434/16 *Nowak v Data Protection Commissioner* ECLI:EU:C:2017:994.

but also subjective, in the form of opinions and assessments, provided that it 'relates' to the data subject.⁶⁷ The two cases lead us to conclude that the Court promotes a wide interpretation of personal data, as personal data does not have to be sensitive in nature, nor does it need to be directly linked to a data subject.

A dataset to which access is requested using the doctrine can contain personal data, non-personal data or a mix of both. If it contains only non-personal data, the data protection regime does not apply. However, as soon as the dataset in question contains some personal data which is wholly or partly processed by automated means, the requirements of the GDPR must be taken in account. This means that access to a dataset containing only non-personal data could be mandated through the doctrine by using the conditions applicable to non-materialised facilities,⁶⁸ without the need for compliance with the GDPR, while access to a dataset containing any amount of personal data would have to comply with the GDPR. It is foreseeable that the majority of data access claims will be centred on datasets containing at least some personal data, both because the term personal data is interpreted broadly and because personal data is usually commercially far more valuable than non-personal data, since it is an essential input for targeted advertising, whereas the commercial value of non-personal data is much lower.⁶⁹ Besides, in the future personal data will be necessary to offer services connected to innovative sectors such as smart mobility, smart living, etc, which will further increase the demand for such data.

3 Possible grounds for obligatory sharing of personal data

Obligatory sharing of essential personal data mandated through the use of the essential facilities doctrine would have to meet at least one of the criteria for the lawfulness of processing of personal data as laid down by the GDPR in Article 6.⁷⁰ In the following section, the paper analyses

⁶⁷ *ibid*, para 34.

⁶⁸ The Court still has to clarify if these are the *IMS Health* or the *Microsoft* criteria.

⁶⁹ In all the three above-mentioned data access cases (*GDF Suez*, *PeopleBrowsr* and *HiQ Labs*) the required data was personal data.

⁷⁰ Art 6(1) GDPR states that:

'Processing shall be lawful only if and to the extent that at least one of the following applies: (a) the data subject has given consent to the processing of his or her personal data for one or more specific purposes; (b) processing is necessary for the performance of a contract to which the data subject is party or in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract; (c) processing is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject; (d) processing is necessary in order to protect the vital interests of the data subject or of another natural person; (e) processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller; (f) processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party, except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of personal data, in particular where the data subject is a child. Point (f) of the first subparagraph shall not apply to processing carried out by public authorities in the performance of their tasks'.

how likely it would be for such data sharing to fulfil one of those conditions.

– The condition that the data subject has given consent to the processing of his or her personal data for one or more specific purposes can realistically not be fulfilled in connection with the essential facilities doctrine as it means that the company that would be ordered to share the personal data it controls would have to obtain the consent of each of the data subjects whose personal data the dataset it shares contains. Most competitively relevant datasets contain personal data from a great number of data subjects (from several tens of thousands upwards, even several hundred million). For the condition to be met, each of those data subjects would have to consent to the whole dataset being shared as it would most likely be impossible to separate the data from the data subjects that consented to their personal data being shared from the data of those who did not. The consent would have to have an active, affirmative form as the GDPR explicitly states that inactivity or silence does not constitute consent.⁷¹ Furthermore, when the data is shared, the company obtaining it would have to acquire consent in the above-mentioned form from the data subjects for each individual operation of data processing. In practice, this would mean that the data would be useless as it would be impossible to process it without violating the rules of the GDPR.

– The condition that processing is necessary for the performance of a contract to which the data subject is party or in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract is met when the data subject and the data processor enter into a contractual relationship that can only be fulfilled if the data subject's personal data is processed by the data processor. An example would be the data processor's offering of certain services that require the data subject's data to be processed (for example, remote health diagnostics). As this condition applies only to purely contractual relationships governed by the law of obligations, it is not foreseeable that it would be relevant for the sharing of personal data mandated through the essential facilities doctrine.

– The processing of personal data is legal if it is done to protect the vital interests of the data subject or of another natural person. As the essential facilities doctrine is a tool to enable the company requiring access to an essential facility to compete on the downstream market and not to protect the interests of any kind of individual persons, this condition cannot be met.

⁷¹ Recital 32 of the GDPR states that: 'Consent should be given by a clear affirmative act establishing a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous indication of the data subject's agreement to the processing of personal data relating to him or her, such as by a written statement, including by electronic means, or an oral statement. This could include ticking a box when visiting an internet website, choosing technical settings for information society services or another statement or conduct which clearly indicates in this context the data subject's acceptance of the proposed processing of his or her personal data. Silence, pre-ticked boxes, or inactivity should not therefore constitute consent'.

– It is highly unlikely that the obligatory sharing of personal data mandated through the essential facilities doctrine would be necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller. This condition can only be applied to public bodies and private bodies vested with the powers of public authorities. In the existing case law of the Commission and of the Court, there has not been a single company that has demanded access to an essential input through the essential facilities doctrine that was vested with such powers. Therefore, while it remains theoretically possible that a private body vested with the powers of public authority would need essential data to carry out tasks in the public interest on the downstream market, such a situation is highly unlikely as it is very difficult to imagine a task carried out in the public interest on a downstream market that would require access to essential personal data.

– A likely legal base for the obligatory sharing of personal data mandated through the use of the essential facilities doctrine would be the requirement that the processing is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject. A Commission decision and a Court judgment mandating access to essential data could constitute a sufficient legal base for the processing (sharing) of personal data. According to the GDPR, a legal base does not have to be a legislative act or a general and abstract legal act but can also be an individual and concrete legal act, as long as it is clear, precise and its application foreseeable to the subject it applies to.⁷² The Commission is empowered to take actions in cases of abuses of dominant positions by Regulation 1/2003⁷³ which could also be interpreted as a legal obligation⁷⁴ as laid down in the GDPR.

– Processing of personal data is not in violation of the GDPR if it is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party, except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject

⁷² Recital 41 of the GDPR states that: 'Where this Regulation refers to a legal basis or a legislative measure, this does not necessarily require a legislative act adopted by a parliament, without prejudice to requirements pursuant to the constitutional order of the Member State concerned. However, such a legal basis or legislative measure should be clear and precise and its application should be foreseeable to persons subject to it, in accordance with the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (the "Court of Justice") and the European Court of Human Rights'.

⁷³ Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2003 of 16 December 2002 on the implementation of the rules on competition laid down in Articles 81 and 82 of the Treaty [2002] OJ L1.

⁷⁴ Art 7(1) of Regulation 1/2003 states that: 'where the Commission, acting on a complaint or on its own initiative, finds that there is an infringement of Article 81 or of Article 82 of the Treaty, it may by decision require the undertakings and associations of undertakings concerned to bring such infringement to an end. For this purpose, it may impose on them any behavioural or structural remedies which are proportionate to the infringement committed and necessary to bring the infringement effectively to an end. Structural remedies can only be imposed either where there is no equally effective behavioural remedy or where any equally effective behavioural remedy would be more burdensome for the undertaking concerned than the structural remedy. If the Commission has a legitimate interest in doing so, it may also find that an infringement has been committed in the past'.

which require protection of personal data, in particular where the data subject is a child. Of all the legal bases for the processing of personal data, this one is the broadest and we can well imagine that it could also cover obligatory data sharing mandated through the essential facilities doctrine. The phrase 'legitimate interest' is not defined in the GDPR (as it includes only illustrative examples) so it is possible that the commercial interests of a company to gain access to essential data necessary for competing on the downstream market might constitute a legitimate interest.^{75,76} Once a legitimate interest of a company (a third party, as it is illogical for the controller to have any (legitimate) interest in the mandatory sharing of the personal data it controls since such sharing weakens its position on the market) is established, it is necessary to weigh it against the interests and reasonable expectations of the data subjects for the protection of their personal data.⁷⁷ This means that in cases where the data subjects reasonably expect their personal data not to be processed by the controller (shared by the company that controls it) or where the personal data contains highly sensitive information (eg about sexual orientation, home address, political affiliation, etc), the legitimate interest of the company requesting access to personal data would probably not override the interests of the data subjects for the protection of their personal data. However, if the data subjects were to reasonably expect that their personal data might be further processed (shared) or if the personal data contained non-sensitive personal information (eg about the consumption of electricity or gas), the commercial interests of the company requesting access to the personal data might outweigh the interests of the data subjects. Such weighing of interests is, of course, problematical, as it is difficult to establish how sensitive personal data is, especially due to the fact that it is possible to combine several datasets consisting of non-sensitive or even non-personal data to obtain highly sensitive personal data. To sum up, in the analysis of whether the interests of a company to gain access to competitively relevant personal data through the use of the essential facilities doctrine outweigh the interests of the data subjects for the protection of their personal data, a three-part test has to be made. 'Firstly, a legitimate interest of the company requesting access to the personal data must be established, secondly, the processing of personal data

⁷⁵ The UK Information Commissioner's Office <<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/legitimate-interests/>> accessed 30 April 2022 states that: 'The legitimate interests can be your own interests or the interests of third parties. They can include commercial interests, individual interests, or broader societal benefits'.

⁷⁶ Recital 47 of the GDPR states that: 'Legitimate interest could exist for example where there is a relevant and appropriate relationship between the data subject and the controller in situations such as where the data subject is a client or in the service of the controller'.

⁷⁷ In recital 47, the GDPR further states that: 'The existence of a legitimate interest would need careful assessment including whether a data subject can reasonably expect at the time and in the context of the collection of the personal data that processing for that purpose may take place. The interests and fundamental rights of the data subject could in particular override the interest of the data controller where personal data are processed in circumstances where data subjects do not reasonably expect further processing'.

must be essential to achieve it, meaning there are no other, less intrusive possibilities, and thirdly, the interests of the company to gain access to the essential data must be weighed against the interests of the data subjects for their personal data not to be processed'.⁷⁸

4 Anonymisation and pseudonymisation as possible circumventions of the data protection regime?

If the above analysed conditions for the lawfulness of processing personal data are not met, personal data cannot be shared without violating the rules of the GDPR. A possible solution to allow personal data to be shared even beyond the conditions set in Article 6 GDPR is its transformation into non-personal data, that is, anonymisation.⁷⁹ Firstly, anonymisation must not be confused with pseudonymisation. Pseudonymisation⁸⁰ takes place by replacing an attribute with another attribute, thereby making it more difficult to connect the data with the data subject. Pseudonymised data can still be (indirectly) linked with a data subject with the use of additional data or information, meaning that the data subject is not identified but still identifiable. Therefore, pseudonymised personal data is still personal data and the data protection rules have to be applied, as was confirmed in the *Nowak* judgment.⁸¹ The most common definition of anonymisation⁸² on the other hand is that it is the process by which personal data is irreversibly altered in such a way that a

⁷⁸ The UK Information Commissioner's Office (n 75).

⁷⁹ In recital 26, the GDPR states that: 'The principles of data protection should therefore not apply to anonymous information, namely information which does not relate to an identified or identifiable natural person or to personal data rendered anonymous in such a manner that the data subject is not or no longer identifiable'.

⁸⁰ Defined in Art 4(5) GDPR as: 'the means for the processing of personal data in such a manner that the personal data can no longer be attributed to a specific data subject without the use of additional information, provided that such additional information is kept separately and is subject to technical and organisational measures to ensure that the personal data are not attributed to an identified or identifiable natural person'.

⁸¹ Furthermore, in recital 6 the GDPR states that: 'the principles of data protection should apply to any information concerning an identified or identifiable natural person. Personal data which have undergone pseudonymisation, which could be attributed to a natural person by the use of additional information should be considered to be information on an identifiable natural person. To determine whether a natural person is identifiable, account should be taken of all the means reasonably likely to be used, such as singling out, either by the controller or by another person to identify the natural person directly or indirectly. To ascertain whether means are reasonably likely to be used to identify the natural person, account should be taken of all objective factors.'

⁸² Article 29 Data Protection Working Party, 'Opinion 05/2014 on Anonymisation Techniques' (2014) <https://ec.europa.eu/justice/article-29/documentation/opinion-recommendation/files/2014/wp216_en.pdf> accessed 15 April 2022, describes the two main techniques of anonymization as randomization and generalization. Randomization removes the link between the personal data and the data subject by either by changing attributes in the dataset so that they are less accurate while they retain the overall distribution or by shuffling the values of attributes and linking them to different data subjects (permutation). Generalization consists of diluting the attributes of data subjects by modifying the respective scale or order of magnitude (for example instead of the category of people who weigh between 60-65 kilos the category of people who weigh between 55-75 kilos is used).

data subject can no longer be identified directly or indirectly, either by the personal data controller alone or in collaboration with any other party.⁸³ The definition above is only partially correct, as the perfect anonymity (a type of anonymity where the re-identification of the data subject by the processor or third parties is even theoretically impossible) described by it does not exist, since there is always a slight chance of the identity of the data subject being revealed (a process called re-identification). In particular, the connection of several anonymised datasets and their analysis with advanced analytical methods can lead to the re-identification of the data subject(s), a phenomenon called the mosaic effect.⁸⁴ For example, 'credit card transactions, location data from a mobile phone, smartcard tap-in tap-out, and browsing (URLs) datasets have all been shown to be re-identifiable'.⁸⁵ This not only happens with the processor or a third party wanting to re-identify one or more data subjects but also by chance when datasets are connected with new datasets that were not considered when anonymising the primary dataset.⁸⁶ European data protection law did not adopt the concept of perfect anonymisation, but rather relies on the concept of effective anonymisation, whereby data is considered anonymised when the re-identification of the data subject(s) is unlikely.⁸⁷

An important drawback of the anonymisation of personal data is that it voids personal data of all or of most of its economic relevance. Companies are interested in personal data for the precise reason that they can relate the data to identified individuals, to whom they can, according to their behaviour, their wants and needs, revealed through the analysis of personal data, offer products and services they are most likely to buy. For example, around 98% of the revenues of Meta (Facebook) are gained through the offering of services of targeted advertising. The Facebook app monitors the web pages the user is visiting and adjusts the adverts shown by the Facebook app accordingly. If a user is visiting the web page of a certain car manufacturer, the Facebook app is more likely to show adverts for cars that this particular brand is producing. Meta (Facebook) usually gets paid for each click on the advertisement (pay-per-click) and therefore has an interest to offer highly personalised adverts as users are more likely to click on them than on random adverts. When personal data is anonymised, it is no longer possible for companies to relate the data to identified individuals and therefore such data cannot be used for the

⁸³ ISO standard 29100, point 2.2 <<https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso-iec:29100:ed-1:v1:en>> accessed 19 April 2022.

⁸⁴ Timothy Asta, 'Guardians of the galaxy of personal data: assessing the threat of big data and examining potential corporate and governmental solutions' (2017) 45(1) Florida State University Law Review 261, 275.

⁸⁵ Jacques Crémer, Yves-Alexandre de Montjoye and Heike Schweitzer, 'Competition Policy for the Digital Era' (2019) 78 <<https://ec.europa.eu/competition/publications/reports/kd0419345enn.pdf>> accessed 13 April 2022.

⁸⁶ Lilijana Selinšek, 'Veliko podatkovje v pravu in ekonomiji: veliki izzivi ali velike težave?' (2015) 7(2) LeXonomica 161, 177.

⁸⁷ Crémer, de Montjoye and Schweitzer (n 85).

same purposes as personal data, but rather only for the identification of the preferences of a certain part of the population (of all the data subjects whose personal data is anonymised), which can also be obtained by financially less burdensome means. It must be noted that anonymisation is also a form of processing of personal information and therefore must fulfil the requirements of the GDPR. Anonymisation is thereby considered to be compatible with the original purposes of the processing only if the anonymisation process is such as to reliably produce anonymised information while the anonymised data must also be retained in an identifiable format to enable the exercise of access rights by data subjects⁸⁸ as required by the Court's *Rijkeboer*⁸⁹ judgment.⁹⁰

5 Findings

Even though data has until now not been considered an essential facility by the Commission and the Court, there is no obstacle for it to be an essential facility if the company controlling it has a dominant position on the upstream (data) market and refuses to grant a competitor on the downstream market access to the data necessary for competing on this market. A typical situation in which access to data could be demanded on grounds of the doctrine is one where a smaller company would need relevant data to conduct its business activities on the downstream market with that data being under the sole control of a large company on the upstream market, as was the case in the above-mentioned *hiQ Labs* and *PeopleBrowsr* cases. Despite the fact that data has some characteristics that distinguish it from traditional essential facilities (its non-rival nature, omnipresence, etc), a situation can arise in which only one company controls a certain dataset necessary for competing on a connected (downstream) market as was the case in the *GDF Suez* case in France and the *hiQ Labs* and *PeopleBrowsr* cases in the USA. The possibility of data constituting an essential facility was clear and present enough for the German legislator to explicitly state in the last amendment to the Act against Restraints of Competition that data can be an essential facility. As most competitively relevant data is personal data, its mandatory sharing under the essential facilities doctrine not only raises traditional ques-

⁸⁸ Art 29 Data Protection Working Party 7.

⁸⁹ Case C-553/07 *College van burgemeester en wethouders van Rotterdam v M E Rijkeboer* ECLI:EU:C:2009:293.

⁹⁰ The judgment stated in para 70 that: 'Article 12(a) of the [95/46] Directive requires Member States to ensure a right of access to information on the recipients or categories of recipient of personal data and on the content of the data disclosed not only in respect of the present but also in respect of the past. It is for Member States to fix a time-limit for storage of that information and to provide for access to that information which constitutes a fair balance between, on the one hand, the interest of the data subject in protecting his privacy, in particular by way of his rights to object and to bring legal proceedings and, on the other, the burden which the obligation to store that information represents for the controller'.

tions about the determination of a facility as an essential facility⁹¹ but also questions related to the permissibility of sharing the data in regard to the data protection regime in force in the EU. Furthermore, even the mandatory sharing of non-personal data could prove problematic from the data protection perspective as it is possible to extract personal data from non-personal data through the combination of several datasets containing non-personal data and the use of advanced analytics. Personal data was interpreted broadly by the Court, meaning that the GDPR applies when processing a wide array of data, even data that is not by nature sensitive or private.

Processing of personal data is permissible if one or more of the six grounds for the legality of processing personal data laid down in Article 6 GDPR are met. The mandatory sharing of personal data through the essential facilities doctrine is likely to meet two of them: the ground that the processing of personal data is a legal obligation of the processor and the ground that either the controller or the third party has a legitimate interest to process the personal data. Firstly, a Commission decision or Court judgment ordering mandatory sharing of personal data with the essential facilities doctrine could be interpreted as a legal obligation to which the controller is subject. The term legal obligation is interpreted broadly in the GDPR, with it being not only a legislative act but also other kinds of general and abstract or individual and concrete legal acts as long as they are clear, precise and their application is foreseeable to the subject they apply to. Commission decisions and Court judgments are likely to meet these criteria as they must be clear and precise by nature. Furthermore, the application of the essential facilities doctrine to a dataset containing essential personal data is also at the very least foreseeable for the companies controlling such data as the essential facilities doctrine is well established in both the Commission's as well as the Court's case law. Secondly, mandatory sharing of personal data through use of the essential facilities doctrine could also constitute a legitimate interest of a third party, namely the company requesting access, as legitimate interests can also be interpreted as the commercial interests of companies. The legitimate interest of a company to gain access to competitively relevant personal data would have to be weighed against the interests of the data subjects for the protection of their personal data. If the data subjects could not reasonably expect their personal data to be shared with the requesting company or if their interests for the protection of their personal data outweighed the interests of the requesting company to gain access to their personal data, the sharing of such data would not be permissible. If, however, the data subjects were to reasonably expect their personal

⁹¹ Whether it is essential in the sense that the refusal to grant access excludes (all or a considerable amount of) competition from the secondary (downstream) market, there are no actual or potential substitutes for the facility and the refusal does not have an objective justification. In the cases of intellectual property rights (non-materialised facilities), the refusal to grant access to the facility must also preclude the emergence of a new product or at least a technical development of the existing product for which there is consumer demand.

data to be shared with the requesting company or if the interest of the requesting company to gain access to that data outweighed the interests of the data subjects for the protection of their personal data, then such data could be shared through the use of the essential facilities doctrine. In the author's opinion, it would not be easy to weigh the interests of the data subjects against the interests of the requesting company, especially given the double-faceted nature of the right to the protection of personal data which is a fundamental right that also pursues goals of an economic nature. The sharing of personal data could be permissible if the personal data does not contain very intimate information but rather information of a more objective kind (consumption of electricity or gas, etc). However, such classification could prove problematic as even personal data of a non-intimate or non-sensitive character could reveal such intimate or sensitive information if it was subjected to the appropriate analytical process (for example, an analysis of the data on electricity consumption could reveal the marital status of a data subject, her or his daily routines, habits, social status, etc). The ground of legitimate interest is vague and open to (too much) interpretation and therefore the ground of legal obligation constitutes a more appropriate legal basis for mandatory sharing of personal data through the use of the essential facilities doctrine. Furthermore, if a Commission decision or a Court judgment constitutes a legal obligation as stated by the GDPR, the ground of legitimate interest becomes void, as any obligatory data sharing mandated by such a legal act would automatically constitute a sufficient basis for the sharing of personal data and it would thus not be necessary to prove that the requesting company has a legitimate interest to gain access to such data.

Another possibility that would allow for the sharing of personal data mandated through the essential facilities doctrine would be their anonymisation. The GDPR only applies to personal data, meaning that the grounds for the legality of processing of personal data do not apply to non-personal data. In fact, the sharing of non-personal data is currently not regulated by any systematic legal act in the EU, and it is up to the parties of a contract to decide on the arrangements for the sharing of such data. If personal data could be effectively anonymised, it could be shared like any other (traditional) essential facility, without having to take account of the special considerations related to the protection of the right to the protection of personal data. However, the anonymisation of personal data has two main drawbacks that severely limit its effectiveness as a means of circumventing the provisions of the GDPR and enabling the sharing of anonymised personal data. Firstly, there is no perfect anonymisation as it is always possible to re-identify the data subjects by using advanced analytics and combining the non-personal data in question with other non-personal data. This means that there is invariably a realistic possibility that the data subjects will be re-identified, either voluntarily or even non-voluntarily by chance in the process of data analysis. Secondly, personal data is valuable to companies as it enables them to identify the interests of identified or at least identifiable individuals that they

can then use for commercial purposes (eg for targeted advertisements). In other words, personal data is valuable exactly because it is personal data. Were personal data transformed into non-personal data, this would void it of all or in the best case of most of its value for companies, as such data could not be used to identify the preferences of data subjects but merely the average interests of a certain part of the population that could also be identified through financially less burdensome means. This leads us to conclude that anonymisation is not an appropriate tool to enable the sharing of personal data as an essential facility.

6 Conclusion

Having concluded the analysis, we can establish that the most appropriate basis for the sharing of personal data mandated through the essential facilities doctrine is the interpretation of the Commission decision or Court judgment ordering the mandatory sharing of such data as a legal obligation. As any Commission decision or Court judgment would be a legally binding basis for the obligatory sharing of personal data, both institutions (as well as national competition protection agencies and courts) which show great reticence in the use of the doctrine even in cases of more traditional facilities would most probably apply the doctrine in an even more conservative manner in cases where personal data were involved. In the author's opinion, this leaves open the question of whether the doctrine would, in practice, be an effective tool for obtaining competitively relevant personal data. This could prove problematic as it is not possible to systematically mandate access to personal data by using ex ante regulation, since data is not an economic sector but is rather present in all economic sectors, with its specificities varying greatly from one sector to another.



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IS THERE ROOM FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY CONSIDERATIONS IN EU COMPETITION POLICY? A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Martin Milán Csirszki*

Abstract: So far, the notion of food sovereignty has not claimed a place at the table of competition law. Although competition law developments in the last four decades have promoted the exclusive dominance of efficiency considerations, the next few years may bring a turning point through the recognition that in the long term economic efficiency also requires social and environmental sustainability, especially in a sector like agriculture. Although family farming has always been dominant in Europe, recent trends of concentration and consolidation in the agricultural and food supply chain as well as globalisation itself have shaken European agricultural producers who face several competition-related problems. This article aims to shed light on whether the theoretical framework of EU competition law and policy are appropriate for the notion of food sovereignty to join the discourse. In order to do so, the article presents the main tenets of ordoliberalism, the prevailing school of thought in EU competition policy, in particular the findings of those ordoliberal scholars who deal with the issues of agriculture. Moreover, the article aims to theorise sovereignty in food sovereignty, in parallel with bringing it into line with ordoliberalism, in order to explore whether the concept of social market economy, one of the key concepts of ordoliberalism explicitly followed by the EU, and in particular ordoliberal competition policy to be realised within the framework of the social market economy, is suitable to take into account food sovereignty's core elements at least at a theoretical level. If it is, it may bring to the fore a viewpoint of EU competition policy which ensures appropriate protection for the agricultural sector to overcome the newly emerging anomalies faced by European agricultural producers as a consequence of globalising markets.

Keywords: food sovereignty, competition law, competition policy, ordoliberalism, agriculture, United States of America, European Union.

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1 Introduction

The article aims to place the notion of food sovereignty in the discourse of competition law and policy. In the literature, although the goals of competition law have been heavily debated in the last four decades, no scholarly works have dealt with these objectives from a sector-specific approach. This paper intends to fill this gap with regard to the agricultural and food supply chain, doing so through the prism of food sovereignty.

Though the conflicting paradigms of food security and food sovereignty mostly occur and are most delicate at the international level, in particular with regard to the issues of international trade in agri-food products, this does not mean that these notions cannot be interpreted within the framework of narrower territorial units. Since one of the strengths of food sovereignty lies in its multi-interpretability,¹ I aim to conceptualise and theorise it in the discourse of EU competition law and policy.

The article proceeds in seven parts. First, it provides a brief introduction to the elements of food sovereignty which present insights into its perceptions of competition and competition law. Second, I sketch the objectives of competition law from a comparative perspective. On the one hand, I deal with that of the United States of America, given that the United States has always played a pioneering role in competition law (antitrust law), and, on the other hand, I map the competition law goals of the European Union. These sections are necessary for me to choose the competition law regime that can consider the competition-related elements of food sovereignty. The dominant approach in the US in the last four decades indicates that framing food sovereignty in the US antitrust law discourse is not too 'profitable' because of the system's single-factor viewpoint of economic efficiency. In contrast, the EU has a much broader standpoint when it comes to the goals of competition law which enables me to take into account important elements of the food sovereignty paradigm. Although I choose the EU competition law regime for further analysis, as a benchmark tool the US antitrust regime is also presented in some cases, in particular in Part 4. Third, I present the findings of two ordoliberal thinkers who have turned to the problems and questions of agriculture. They were chosen because ordoliberalism has had a significant impact on EU competition policy since the very beginnings of European integration after World War II. Fourth, I aim to theorise sovereignty in food sovereignty, because this allows me to bring it into line with ordoliberalism. *Prima facie*, although all of the above, and in particular the US standpoint towards antitrust, could result in the conclusion that the US has no special antitrust laws applying to the agricultural sector and the food supply chain, the reality is different. Therefore, fifth, I list briefly those competition-related laws of both the EU and the US which

¹ Maarten A Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernisation and the Policy Process* (OUP 1995).

provide special sectoral treatment for agriculture and the food supply chain, thereby leaving room for a more humane and non-efficiency-based approach to competition law in these economic sectors. Sixth, I conclude.

2 Food sovereignty and competition

In this article, similarly to Schanbacher,² Martínez-Torres and Rosset,³ McMichael⁴ and Wills,⁵ I perceive and construe the paradigms of food security and food sovereignty as a global conflict. In this part, I aim to explore those elements of food sovereignty which may provide us with starting points for the way competition is perceived within its framework. In some aspects, I use the paradigm of food security as a conflicting basis for comparison.

Important findings on food sovereignty's approach to competition and trade can be collected from the 2002 food sovereignty definition which declares that it does not negate trade but aims to promote trade policies and practices serving the rights of peoples to food, hand in hand with safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production.⁶ In the multi-level food supply chain, worrisome concerns not only arise from anti-competitive cartels, abuse of dominance and mergers,⁷ but also from unfair trading practices against suppliers of agri-food products falling outside the scope of conventional competition law instruments. In many cases, the latter remain hidden from the eyes of competition authorities, on one hand because of the lack of normative and prohibitive regulation, and, on the other hand, if there is some kind of regulation, because of the fear factor which discourages suppliers from making a formal complaint against offenders out of fear of commercial retaliation.⁸ Both these market behaviours which can be assessed with traditional competition law instruments and the unfair trading practices emerging in contractual relations are unacceptable if one uses the food sovereignty definition as a benchmark tool.

² William Schanbacher, *The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty* (Praeger Security International 2010).

³ María Elena Martínez-Torres and Peter Rosset, 'Diálogo de saberes in La Vía Campesina: Food Sovereignty and Agroecology' (2014) 41 *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 979.

⁴ Philip McMichael, 'Historicizing Food Sovereignty' (2014) 41 *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 933.

⁵ Joe Wills, *Contesting World Order? Socioeconomic Rights and Global Justice Movements* (CUP 2017).

⁶ Michael Windfuhr and Jennie Jonsén, *Food Sovereignty: Towards Democracy in Localized Food Systems* (ITDG Publishing 2005).

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Competition Issues in the Food Chain Industry* (OECD Publishing 2013).

⁸ Till Göckler, *Angstfaktor und unlautere Handelspraktiken – Eine Untersuchung anlässlich des Grünbuchs der Europäischen Kommission über unlautere Handelspraktiken in der b2b-Lieferkette* (Mohr Siebeck 2017).

Although it was mentioned that the paradigm of food sovereignty has emerged most significantly at the international level and aims to formulate suggestions with regard to international trade in agricultural and food products, it is apparent from its self-determination that it argues against completely free markets lacking the guardian role of state regulation.⁹ In general, it defines the state as the protector of farmers,¹⁰ and this need for protection is also to be interpreted regarding the agricultural markets and the role farmers should play therein. It not only refers to international markets but also to regional and national ones. Food security advocates argue for the liberalisation of markets as the one and only means to achieve their objectives. However, at the international level the proponents of food sovereignty represent the view that the World Trade Organization should get out of agriculture because free trade policies and their foundation in the form of neoclassical economics are not suitable to meet the needs of agriculture and the food sector.¹¹ Neoclassical economics is also the basis for those competition law regimes which consider the goal of economic efficiency as the exclusive aim of antitrust, as in the US in the last four decades with the dominance of the Chicago School. The core principle of neoclassical economics is to maximise allocative efficiency,¹² which – in antitrust terms – is understood as consumer welfare.¹³ Consumer welfare is no other than the guiding principle of the Chicago School of antitrust dominating the US antitrust regime from the appearance of Robert Bork's *The Antitrust Paradox*.¹⁴

Neoclassical economics and its political philosophy background in the form of neoliberalism are condemned by food sovereignty which cannot accept, and argues against, the trait of neoliberalism based on which separate economic, social and political spheres are evaluated according to a single economic logic.¹⁵ With regard to competition law, this single-mindedness lies in the approach that considers consumer welfare as the one and only legitimate objective of competition law. From the perspective of food sovereignty, with regard to agricultural and food products, this can be best described as the commodification of food products. From a neoliberal and a food security standpoint, regarding the notions of competition and of food, the only considerations to be taken into account are economic ones, which are against the immanent features of food sov-

⁹ Windfuhr and Jonsén (n 6).

¹⁰ Alana Mann, *Global Activism in Food Politics: Power Shift* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014) 54.

¹¹ Peter M Rosset, *Food is Different: Why We Must Get the WTO Out of Agriculture* (Zed Books 2006).

¹² Robert D Atkinson and David B Audretsch, 'Economic Doctrines and Approaches to Antitrust' (2011) Indiana University-Bloomington: School of Public & Environmental Affairs Research Paper Series No 2011-01-02, <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1750259#> accessed 6 October 2021.

¹³ Dina I Waked, 'Antitrust as Public Interest Law: Redistribution, Equity, and Social Justice' (2020) 65 *The Antitrust Bulletin* 87, 88.

¹⁴ Robert Bork, *The Antitrust Paradox* (Free Press 1978).

¹⁵ William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism* (SAGE Publications 2014) 31–32.

ereignty. By challenging the dominance of agribusiness and the unjust trade system¹⁶ and by not negating trade,¹⁷ food sovereignty – on the contrary – puts significant emphasis on social considerations and aims to contribute to a humane market economy which intends to surpass the neoliberal market economy strictly operating with economic terms.

In summary, the paradigm of food sovereignty builds upon a mode of competition and a way of market functioning which require the guardian role of the state in the form of legal regulation aiming to protect the interests of agricultural producers and farmers as well as those of small and medium-sized enterprises. It craves extensive and strong competition law legislation and enforcement dominated not only by efficiency-based considerations but also non-efficiency-based ones.

3 The objectives of competition law

The reason for briefly reviewing the objectives of competition law is that they have a crucial impact on the application and interpretation of competition laws,¹⁸ and thus are also of paramount importance when speaking of sector-specific regulation. Debates on competition law/antitrust law goals are continuous, so much so that one must admit the arbitrary nature of the question of what competition law objectives should be. It would be more exact to pose the question as what we want from markets and antitrust, considering that the answer to the former question ‘is typically given in terms of what the respondent – invariably an inside player who has already formed a normative view – believes the operational guiding principle should be’.¹⁹ This means that most of the positions on the goals of competition law are prejudicial because they are preliminarily determined by the respective respondent’s own perceptions of what we aim to strengthen with the help of functioning markets.

Although competition law objectives are rather dynamic and not static in nature,²⁰ in general and based on Akman’s approach, two main groups of objectives can be identified: one group is connected to the notion of welfare, while the other to notions unrelated to efficiency.²¹ While

¹⁶ Mann (n 10).

¹⁷ Windfuhr and Jonsén (n 6).

¹⁸ Deborah Healey, ‘The Ambit of Competition Law: Comments on Its Goals’ in Deborah Healey, Michael Jacobs and Rhonda L Smith (eds), *Research Handbook on Methods and Models of Competition Law* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2020) 12.

¹⁹ Eleanor M Fox, ‘Against Goals’ (2013) 81 *Fordham Law Review* 2157, 2159.

²⁰ Roger Van den Bergh, ‘The Goals of Competition Law’ in Roger Van den Bergh, Peter Camesasca and Andrea Giannaccari (eds) *Comparative Competition Law and Economics* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2017) 86, 88.

²¹ Pinar Akman, *The Concept of Abuse in EU Competition Law: Law and Economic Approaches* (Hart Publishing 2012) 25; see also the dichotomy of competition law goals: Martin Meier, ‘Pleading for a “Multiple Goal Approach” in European Competition Law: Outline of a Conciliatory Path Between the “Freedom to Compete Approach” and the “More Economic Approach”’ in Klaus Mathis and Avishalom Tor (eds), *New Developments in Competition Law and Economics* (Springer 2019) 51, 51–52.

the former is dominated by economic considerations (in particular, by the considerations of welfare economics), the latter focuses also on considerations other than different types of welfare. For an even clearer clustering and simple terminology, one may group competition law objectives to efficiency-based and non-efficiency-based goals. However, non-efficiency-based goals do not necessarily mean that efficiency is not taken into account throughout the enforcement of competition laws. For example, the competition law goal of the protection of the competitive process or, in other words, the protection of competition as such does not imply that consumer welfare, understood as allocative efficiency,²² is not and cannot be enhanced, given that '[p]rotecting the competitive process is economically efficient'.²³ Nonetheless, a complex assessment requires that not only the process but also the outcome be taken into account.²⁴

In the last four decades, debates on the goals of competition law have taken a direction where voices echoing the triumph of enhancing efficiency prevail over fairness (and justice) concerns. Nowadays, however, it seems that we may be in an overlapping period. The now dominant efficiency-based approach is gradually ending, just as a new era is taking shape with more emphasis on non-efficiency-based objectives.²⁵ The common question which – according to Nihoul – always arises as to the notion of efficiency is how to measure it: '[s]hould we aim at maximising consumer welfare? Producer welfare? Total welfare?'²⁶ The adoption of any of these economic welfare standards by enforcement authorities is of particular importance regarding the outcome of decisions.²⁷ Nevertheless, not all scholars share the view that these standards are of paramount relevance to enforcement. The picture is nuanced by, for example, Motta: 'consumer and total welfare standards would not often imply very different decisions by anti-trust agencies and courts'.²⁸

It is worth standing back here for a moment. Though scholars and practitioners speak of consumer or total welfare, and there is debate as to which should be applied in law enforcement, some confusion may emerge in terminological aspects. The so-called 'Chicago trap' refers to Bork's misleading terminology which used the expression 'consumer wel-

²² Waked (n 13).

²³ Ignacio Herrera Anchustegui, *Buyer Power in EU Competition Law* (Concurrences 2017) 89.

²⁴ Akman (n 21) 47.

²⁵ Barak Orbach, 'The Present New Antitrust Era' (2018) 60 *William & Mary Law Review* 1439.

²⁶ Paul Nihoul, 'Choice vs Efficiency?' (2012) 3 *Journal of European Competition Law & Practice* 315.

²⁷ Pieter Kalbfleisch, 'Aiming for Alliance: Competition Law and Consumer Welfare' (2011) 2 *Journal of European Competition Law & Practice* 108. For more, see Louis Kaplow, 'On the Choice of Welfare Standards in Competition Law' in Daniel Zimmer (ed), *The Goals of Competition Law* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2012) 3.

²⁸ Massimo Motta, *Competition Policy: Theory and Practice* (CUP 2004) 19.

fare' but by this the 'total welfare' standard was actually meant.²⁹ In this sense, one must mention that the Chicago School has propagated total welfare rather than consumer welfare,³⁰ but the idea remains in history as the antitrust consumer welfare paradigm. Subsequently, to avoid any misunderstanding, I will use the term 'consumer welfare (paradigm)' to refer to the inherent feature of the school of thought which supports pure efficiency-based competition law. For the arguments raised by this article, it is not really relevant whether we are talking about 'true' consumer welfare as used by Salop,³¹ or total welfare disguised as consumer welfare. What is pertinent is the limitation of any of these standards and objectives to efficiency-based considerations in competition law.

Since the 1978 publication of Bork's *The Antitrust Paradox*, consumer welfare in the US has become 'the only articulated goal of antitrust law' and 'the governing standard',³² and later, commencing with the statements of the European Commission in the late 1990s and appearing in a legally binding form in the 2004 Merger Regulation,³³ it has strongly infiltrated discourse on the goals of EU competition law as the more economic approach to European competition law. Though the years have passed, the clear-cut breakthrough has fallen short of consumer welfare and the more economic approach expected in the aspect of legal certainty and clarity, and this has been voiced in both Europe³⁴ and the US.³⁵ Recently, four decades after its introduction, critics of consumer welfare have become increasingly vocal, and in the words of Mark Glick, 'the winds of change are blowing',³⁶ meaning that 'the relative stability of the antitrust consensus has yielded to a sharp rupture'.³⁷ As Crane put it: '[i]n the last two years, the self-styled neo-Brandeis movement has emerged out of virtually nowhere to claim a position at the bargaining table over antitrust reform and the future of the antitrust enterprise'.³⁸ The premonition is

²⁹ KJ Cseres, *Competition Law and Consumer Protection* (Wolters Kluwer 2005) 331.

³⁰ Pinar Akman, "'Consumer" versus "Costumer": The Devil in the Detail' (2010) 37 *Journal of Law and Society* 322.

³¹ Steven C Salop, 'Question: What Is the Real and Proper Antitrust Welfare Standard? Answer: The True Consumer Welfare Standard' (2010) 22 *Loyola Consumer Law Review* 336.

³² Barak Y Orbach, 'The Antitrust Consumer Welfare Paradox' (2010) 7 *Journal of Competition Law & Economics* 133.

³³ Christian Kirchner, 'Goals of Antitrust and Competition Law Revisited' in Dieter Schmidtchen, Max Albert and Stefan Voigt (eds), *The More Economic Approach to European Competition Law* (Mohr Siebeck 2007) 7.

³⁴ Victoria Daskalova, 'Consumer Welfare in EU Competition Law: What Is It (Not) About?' (2015) 11 *The Competition Law Review* 131.

³⁵ See, for example, Orbach (n 32).

³⁶ Mark Glick, 'American Gothic: How Chicago Economics Distorts "Consumer Welfare" in Antitrust' <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3423081> accessed 16 August 2021.

³⁷ Lina Khan, 'The End of Antitrust History Revisited' (2020) 133 *Harvard Law Review* 1655.

³⁸ Daniel A Crane, 'How Much Brandeis Do the Neo-Brandeisians Want?' (2019) 64 *The Antitrust Bulletin* 531.

best exemplified in the US by the appointment of Lina Khan as the chairperson of the Federal Trade Commission. Of course, the appearance of the Neo-Brandeisians – the emerging school of thought which intensively criticises the consumer welfare paradigm – has not been without reaction, and these new ‘hipster antitrust’ proponents are criticised because of their provocative proposals for changes to the antitrust regime directed by the sole objective of consumer welfare, arguing that the proposals lack little to no empirical evidence.³⁹ At the same time, neither have consumer welfare advocates escaped strong criticism. Some have even called competition law based on consumer welfare profound nonsense by arguing that it is built upon ‘false history, false concepts and false economics’.⁴⁰

Although the more economic approach has infiltrated EU competition law, the dominant school of thought, the ordoliberal competition policy still prevails in the European Union, as the comprehensive empirical research of Stylianou and Iacovides clearly indicates the polythematic nature of EU competition law.⁴¹ One of the main concepts of ordoliberalism, the model of social market economy, has even found its place in the text of Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union. Though the literature is not consistent on this issue, according to Behrens, the ordoliberal approach had a dominant influence on the drafting of the European notion of the abuse of dominance.⁴² Anchustegui even finds generally that ordoliberalism has shaped and continues to influence EU competition policy.⁴³ Nedergaard also posits that the greatest correspondence among EU policies and the ordoliberal school of thought can be found between the competition policy of the EU and ordoliberalism.⁴⁴

A recent empirical study has found that EU competition law follows a multitude of goals and all seven objectives examined have existed from the 1960s until now. The authors call it a risky but not unsubstantiated finding that the competition law goals connected to the ordoliberal school of thought are continuously present; they also conclude that the protection of competition as such, that is, the protection of the competi-

³⁹ Joshua D Wright and others, ‘Requiem for a Paradox: The Dubious Rise and Inevitable Fall of Hipster Antitrust’ (2019) 51 *Arizona State Law Journal* 293; Christopher S Yoo, ‘Hipster Antitrust: New Bottles, Same Old W(h)ine?’ (2018) *Faculty Scholarship at Penn Law* <https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/2168/> accessed 16 August 2021.

⁴⁰ Sandeep Vaheesan, ‘The Profound Nonsense of Consumer Welfare Antitrust’ (2019) 64 *The Antitrust Bulletin* 479.

⁴¹ Konstantinos Stylianou and Marios C Iacovides, ‘The Goals of EU Competition Law: A Comprehensive Empirical Investigation’ (2019) <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3735795>> accessed 23 December 2021.

⁴² Peter Behrens, ‘The Ordoliberal Concept of “Abuse” of a Dominant Position and Its Impact on Article 102 TFEU’ (2015) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2658045> accessed 23 July 2021.

⁴³ Ignacio Herrera Anchustegui, ‘Competition Law through an Ordoliberal Lens’ (2015) 2 *Oslo Law Review* 139.

⁴⁴ Peter Nedergaard, ‘The Ordoliberalisation of the European Union?’ (2019) 42 *Journal of European Integration* 213.

tive process, takes precedence over outcome considerations.⁴⁵ The most emphasised ordoliberal competition law goals are the protection of individual economic freedom and of the competitive process⁴⁶ which – as a consequence of the above – play a crucial role in EU competition law.

As a significant difference one can mention that the single-factor economic efficiency approach towards competition law in the form of formulating consumer welfare as the exclusive goal takes into account only short-term results resulting in consumer surplus which, simply put, means lower prices to consumers. At the same time, constructing a competition law regime with a broader variety of goals, such as the ordoliberal notions of the protection of the competitive process and of individual economic freedom, goes hand in hand with a more far-reaching standpoint which also respects middle and long-term results. The dominant US antitrust approach over the past forty years belongs to the former, while the EU's broader, multi-purpose approach belongs to the latter, at least at a theoretical level. This is why I aim to conceptualise and theorise food sovereignty within the EU competition law discourse. This choice is in line with Patel's not too favourable finding that the European Union 'is not a place characterised by food sovereignty', although it is still better off than the US despite the heavy criticism of food sovereignty advocates raining down on the Common Agricultural Policy. Patel finds this because the EU provides 'better prospects for small-scale farmers' than the US.⁴⁷ It is also true for the interface between food sovereignty and competition law.

4 Ordoliberalism and agriculture

Although it is a common mistake to consider that ordoliberalism is strictly associated with the first generation of ordoliberal thinkers who are from the Freiburg School,⁴⁸ it may nevertheless be an appropriate starting point when one aims to analyse an issue from an ordoliberal viewpoint. Obviously, ordoliberalism is constantly changing and evolving, that is, one cannot ignore looking at it using a dynamic approach, but core concepts represented by first-generation ordoliberals are useful benchmark tools. The mainstream and most famous ordoliberal thinkers did not pay particular attention to agricultural issues, but there was one economist whose writings include far-sighted considerations for agriculture. This is Wilhelm Röpke who was called 'something of an agrarian' by

⁴⁵ Konstantinos Stylianou and Marios C Iacovides, 'The Goals of EU Competition Law: A Comprehensive Empirical Investigation' (2019) <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3735795>> accessed 23 December 2021.

⁴⁶ Anchustegui (n 43).

⁴⁷ Raj Patel, 'What Does Food Sovereignty Look Like?' (2009) 36 *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 663.

⁴⁸ Behrens (n 42).

Milton Friedman.⁴⁹ Röpke was not only an economist but also a prominent philosophical thinker who wanted to adopt a systemic approach. I do not claim that the thoughts of Röpke on agriculture can be wholly equated with those of mainstream ordoliberals or, in general, with the basic and insurmountable findings and assumptions of ordoliberalism, but these may be considered when trying to provide an image of such a peripheral issue as agriculture from an ordoliberal standpoint.

Wilhelm Röpke, in his book *International Economic Disintegration*, acknowledges the special features of agriculture. The 'singular character' of agriculture comes from its strong interrelations with nature. The processes of agricultural production are embedded in a system where natural factors are decisive. Röpke lists several distinctive characteristics of agriculture which contribute to its peculiar nature in contrast with industrial production. He emphasises and lists why agriculture is a special sector of economic life:

the limits set to mechanization, division of labour and use of machinery; the constant need of soil preservation by a complex combination of measures; the everpresent tendency toward diminishing returns; the irregularity and precariousness of its output; the unchangeable rhythm of seasonal or longer production periods; the difficulties of storage; the usefulness of combining different lines of agricultural production horizontally or vertically; and the tendency toward a lower optimum size of the unit of production than exists generally in industry.⁵⁰

Besides Wilhelm Röpke, one can also mention an internationally less known ordoliberal thinker who is quite a polymath: Constantin von Dietze. He was an agronomist, lawyer, economist, and theologian, and thus he represented a rich and holistic viewpoint. The translated title of one of his most relevant works is *Agriculture and Competition Order*.⁵¹

After presenting the differences between agriculture and industry, von Dietze submits that farmers are also overwhelmingly driven by profit maximisation.⁵² Nevertheless, antedating the EU's approach which provides exemption from the general cartel prohibition for the agricultural sector and harmonising his thoughts with those of Röpke, he finds with regard to horizontal agreements that the completeness of the competition cannot be ruled out even by agreements between dozens or hundreds of agricultural suppliers because of the great number of competing farmers. He also considers the entire agricultural sector as a prime

⁴⁹ Amity Shlaes, 'The Foreigners Buchanan Calls His Own' *Wall Street Journal* (New York, 29 February 1996) cited by Samuel Gregg, *Wilhelm Röpke's Political Economy* (Edward Elgar 2010) 2.

⁵⁰ Wilhelm Röpke, *International Economic Disintegration* (William Hodge and Company 1942) 111–112.

⁵¹ Constantin von Dietze, 'Landwirtschaft und Wettbewerbsordnung' (1942) 66 *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 129.

⁵² *ibid* 132.

example of the realisation of the conditions of complete competition.⁵³ In von Dietze's opinion, and I must add that these are timeless anomalies related to agricultural production and that is why I mention them, after the prosperous decades from the 1820s to the 1870s, several problems arose which carried negative effects on the agricultural sector: the rural exodus causing fewer and fewer agricultural workers, urbanisation, price fluctuations, as well as monopolisation. The agricultural sector felt that the monopolisation that was taking place in other sectors of the economy through powerful mergers was disadvantageous for its profession, which remained in complete competition. Thus, towards the end of the 19th century, plans were made and efforts exerted almost all over the world to oppose the traders or industrial monopolies with equally strong associations, ie to monopolise the supply of important agricultural products as well.⁵⁴ What von Dietze established 80 years ago is still true today: market actors downstream in the supply chain, such as market operators of the processing industry and the retail chains, have a negative impact on the pricing of raw materials to the disadvantage of primary agricultural producers. Or, conversely, suppliers of agricultural products face serious challenges because of the significant imbalances in bargaining power, and, as a result, unfair trading practices against them are a common occurrence.⁵⁵ Von Dietze saw the future of family farming (and, in general, that of agriculture), as well as the preservation of its rural character, in adopting an economic policy according to the constituting and regulating principles of the ordoliberal notion of competitive order (*Wettbewerbsordnung*).⁵⁶ For my analysis, the most important of the constituting principles is freedom of contract which, nevertheless, can be limited for the sake of well-functioning competition; besides, with regard to the regulating principles, I must emphasise the containment of market power.⁵⁷ The principle of freedom of contract is of high relevance when speaking of unfair trading practices in the agricultural and food supply chain, while the containment of market power is relevant because, in most cases, a certain degree of (relative or absolute) market power is necessary to perform unfair trading practices against suppliers. At least a certain degree of relative market power is needed to conduct unfair trading practice, which – from the supplier's (the abused party's) perspective – in many cases results in the restriction of the principle of freedom of contract, more exactly in the restriction of the freedom to determine the content of the contract. That is, the respective supplier has no choice in determining

⁵³ *ibid* 133.

⁵⁴ *ibid* 140.

⁵⁵ Directive (EU) 2019/633 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain [2019] OJ L111/59, Recital (1).

⁵⁶ von Dietze (n 51) 147.

⁵⁷ Christian Ahlborn and Carsten Grave, 'Walter Eucken and Ordoliberalism: An Introduction from a Consumer Welfare Perspective' (2006) 2 *Competition Policy International* 197, 203.

the terms of the contract, of which he is one of the contracting parties. This comes from the fact that the buyer has relative market power vis-à-vis, and is in a superior bargaining position over, its supplier. This means that the realisation of a competitive order goes not only against the monopolistic and oligopolistic trends taking place downstream in the food supply chain at the level of processing and retailing but also stands up for freedom of contract which should not be used in the competitive order to create dependencies between market players because these dependencies may result in unfair trading practices against agricultural producers.

5 Conceptualising food sovereignty with ordoliberalism in the EU

This part of the paper aims to provide a possible interpretation of 'sovereignty' in 'food sovereignty'. While doing so, in parallel I bring to the fore the tenets of ordoliberalism and ordoliberal competition policy which may serve as potential interfaces between them and food sovereignty.

One of the main goals of ordoliberalism, ie ensuring autonomy for citizens against private and public monopoly powers through a constitutional economic framework, can be raised to the level of collective autonomy within the framework of the agriculture and food supply chain if one accepts Raf Geenens' interpretation of sovereignty. He uses the term 'sovereignty' as 'the name for the perspective a community adopts when it sees itself as collectively autonomous'.⁵⁸ Within the domain of the agriculture and food supply chain, food sovereignty can be perceived as the perspective of a collectively autonomous community making a stand for defining their agricultural and food policy. To mention one example, most agricultural producers share the vision that trade in agri-food products and the food chain in general should be fairer, more balanced and transparent. This demand is one of the most emphasised and important topics in agricultural policy-making processes. Agricultural producers appear as collectively autonomous in fighting for their common goal: by making a stand for certain demands, they aim to define their own agricultural and food policy.⁵⁹

With this conceptualisation, one has to give up neither the ordoliberal approach of competition, ie the claim for setting up the rules of the game through state regulation, nor the concept of food sovereignty. Furthermore, one can seize food sovereignty as a kind of collective autonomy which can be traced back to the notion of individual autonomy as a value to be protected by ordoliberalism. If one accepts the ordoliberal viewpoint and thus the necessity of regulating competition through general rules, and if one also accepts Röpke's ordoliberal thoughts on agriculture which hold that 'in this sector [...] a particularly high degree of far-sighted, protective, directive, regulating and balancing intervention is not only defen-

⁵⁸ Raf Geenens, 'Sovereignty as Autonomy' (2017) 36 *Law and Philosophy* 495.

⁵⁹ See, for example, the agricultural lobby groups in the EU <https://copa-cogeca.eu/food_chain#b435> accessed 1 April 2022.

sible, but even mandatory’,⁶⁰ the concept of food sovereignty can be easily reconciled with the ordoliberal approach protecting individual autonomy against public and private constraints of competition. It is one step from the individual to the collective level, from the individual autonomy protected by ordoliberalism to the concept of food sovereignty perceived as a collective autonomy of a community with the emphasised aim of challenging the restrictions of competition exercised by agribusiness, ie giant food enterprises, be it a processor, wholesaler, or retail chain.

Raf Geenens pronouncedly builds his theory of sovereignty as autonomy upon the works of Jürgen Habermas. He emphasises that Habermas provides ‘the most elaborate account of sovereignty as autonomy’.⁶¹ If one scrutinises the works of Habermas, one may find a thought that can be drawn as an exact parallel to the viewpoint of ordoliberalism. In one of his books, he says that ‘basic rights must now do more than just protect private citizens from encroachment by the state apparatus, [p]rivate autonomy is endangered today at least as much by positions of economic and social power’.⁶² Ordoliberalism has the same approach: it cannot imagine a mode of economy other than the market economy but wants to set up the rules of the game within the framework of which market actors will perform their economic activities. It is coherent with the view of Habermas: ‘it has become impossible to break out of the universe of capitalism; the only remaining option is to civilise and tame the capitalist dynamic from within’.⁶³ The instrument for civilising and taming the capitalist dynamic is none other than creating competition rules within an economic constitutional framework which highlights economic liberties and individual autonomy. Ironically, the aim of competition law is to save capitalism from itself.⁶⁴

Although it seems paradoxical to support individual autonomy and collective autonomy at the same time, these two types of autonomy are understood as categories in two different spheres. Individual autonomy (individual economic freedom) as protected by ordoliberalism refers to the capacity to live one’s life according to reasons and motives that are taken as one’s own and not according to manipulative and/or distorting external forces, that is to say, it refers to being economically independent. In its ordoliberal sense, it is economic capacity and one of the most important principles of the economic constitutional framework. At the same time, food sovereignty perceived as a type of collective autonomy is a political

⁶⁰ Wilhelm Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (University of Chicago Press 1950) 205.

⁶¹ Geenens (n 58) 524.

⁶² Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (MIT Press 1996) 263.

⁶³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (Polity Press 2012) 106.

⁶⁴ Richard Whish, ‘Do Competition Lawyers Harm Welfare?’ (Concurrentialiste – Journal of Antitrust Law, 11 May 2020) <<https://leconcurrentialiste.com/richard-whish-welfare/>> accessed 23 December 2021.

term.⁶⁵ Individuals can have individual autonomy, that is, they can be independent from an economic point of view, but when stepping up to the political arena, these individuals can determine themselves as collectively autonomous who all fight for their individual autonomy and for remaining independent. They become collectively autonomous through trying to achieve the same goal: maintaining their independence in and by determining their own agricultural and food policy. These notions, thus, have the same legal implications and can be connected to each other with a mutual legal objective: protecting agricultural producers, farmers, small and medium-scale enterprises by creating effective competition and trade law rules and enforcing them in the same manner.

Ordoliberalism and food sovereignty have another common feature: they both intend to re-introduce and re-emphasise social issues in pursuance of their goals. In general, ordoliberalism aims to combine economic efficiency with a just and stable social order.⁶⁶ The fact that ordoliberalism is also known as German neoliberalism should not mislead anyone:⁶⁷ '[a]s a matter of legal and political form, ordoliberalism and neoliberalism are often in tension with each other, as ordoliberalism's rule-based commitments come up against neoliberal discretionary politics'.⁶⁸ The feature that distinguishes ordoliberalism from neoliberalism is that the latter views the world as a market and tries to govern it as if it were a market, and it refuses the separation of economic, social and political spheres, 'evaluating all three according to a single economic logic'.⁶⁹ In contrast, even the name of one of the most significant notions of ordoliberalism carries its socially focused nature: social market economy.⁷⁰ The concept of social market economy brought to the fore by Müller-Armack has at least three core concepts: (a) the preservation of the market economy as a dynamic order; (b) social equilibrium, which is subject to the observance of the first sentence; and (c) securing stability and growth through monetary and competition policy.⁷¹ The social market economy is a normative

⁶⁵ Windfuhr and Jonsén (n 6).

⁶⁶ Brigitte Young, 'Ordoliberalism as an 'Irritating German Idea' in Thorsten Beck and Hans-Helmut Kotz (eds), *Ordoliberalism: A German Oddity?* (CEPR Press 2017) 31, 35.

⁶⁷ The reason behind this is that ordoliberalism and neoliberalism 'happened to be very much on the same page with regard to the exact matters that now set them apart from each other – after all, both are widely and correctly considered to be subcurrents or variations of the same neoliberal tradition'. See Thomas Biebricher, 'Freiburg and Chicago: How the Two Worlds of Neoliberalism Drifted Apart Over Market Power and Monopolies' (2021) ProMarket <<https://promarket.org/2021/06/27/freiburg-and-chicago-how-the-two-worlds-of-neoliberalism-drifted-apart-over-market-power-and-monopolies/>> accessed 31 March 2022.

⁶⁸ Michael A Wilkinson, 'Authoritarian Liberalism in Europe: A Common Critique of Neoliberalism and Ordoliberalism' (2019) 45 *Critical Sociology* 1023, 1024.

⁶⁹ Davies (n 15).

⁷⁰ For more, see Viktor J Vanberg, 'The Freiburg School: Walter Eucken and Ordoliberalism' (2004) *Freiburger Diskussionspapiere zur Ordnungsökonomik* No 04/11 <https://www.eucken.de/wp-content/uploads/04_11bw.pdf?x34410> accessed 23 December 2021.

⁷¹ Ralf Ptak, *Vom Ordoliberalismus zur Sozialen Marktwirtschaft – Stationen des Neoliberalismus in Deutschland* (Springer Fachmedien 2004) 227.

system based on values such as dignity, well-being, self-determination, encouragement, freedom and responsibility of all individuals; it is fully committed to a humane society in which 'economic growth and social sustainability are compatible notions'.⁷²

Contrary to ordoliberalism, neoliberalism lacks the desire to achieve social equilibrium and takes into account no concerns other than economic ones. This is the ground for us to be able to reconcile food sovereignty with ordoliberalism. At the same time, this is the reason which establishes the impossibility for neoliberalism to be in line with food sovereignty. In all its aspects, food sovereignty – as it has emerged as a social movement – pursues the aim of having social considerations taken into account during policy-making processes. The trait of ordoliberalism that it does not just consider economic efficiency as the exclusive objective of competition law means that other (non-economic) considerations may be taken into account when adopting and enforcing competition laws in a broad sense. Therefore, in an ordoliberal concept of competition law, which – as mentioned – does not limit itself to achieving one and only one objective, ie consumer welfare through economic efficiency, non-economic aspects may also appear when deciding whether or not a conduct is harmful to competition. This means that food sovereignty with its social aims is not contrary to ordoliberalism. As the definition provides, food sovereignty does not negate trade but aims to create trade practices which are able to break the dominance of agribusiness. Doing so is motivated by social considerations which also appear in the ordoliberal line of thinking. The ordoliberal approach of adopting the rules of the game through legislation which direct the behaviour of market participants is in accordance with food sovereignty, since the latter also wants a level playing field. 'Food sovereignty promotes the role of the state as protector of farmers' interests',⁷³ which can only be realised through legislation. This does not mean that inefficient undertakings and market actors will be prioritised, but all operators on the respective market will have equal opportunities as a result of the aim to reach social equilibrium. In the broadest context, the ultimate goal is that all market participants be part of a humane economy.⁷⁴ Criticism may be made that this links competition law with redistributive objectives, and redistribution is not an aspect with which competition law should deal. Still, it is worth reconceptualising and perceiving redistribution from another approach. Adopting the thoughts of Eleanor Fox, if we refuse to accept that competition law can

⁷² Doris Hildebrand, 'The Equality and Social Fairness Objectives in EU Competition Law: The European School of Thought' (2017) *Concurrences* <<https://www.concurrences.com/en/review/issues/no-1-2017/law-economics/the-equality-and-social-fairness-objectives-in-eu-competition-law-the-european>> accessed 18 December 2021.

⁷³ Mann (n 10).

⁷⁴ Wilhelm Röpke, *A Humane Economy: The Social Framework of the Free Market* (Intercollegiate Studies Institute 2014).

and should contribute to redistribution⁷⁵ and if we view competition law as something that should only deal with economic efficiency, we may also acknowledge that redistribution is taken over from the state by and positioned in the hands of giant undertakings.⁷⁶ Food sovereignty also emphasises the problem of decreasing state regulatory power.⁷⁷

The strength of food sovereignty is that it may provide us with answers at different levels,⁷⁸ as well as that it has the feature of multi-interpretability.⁷⁹ This allows us to identify two trends from different directions but leading to the same result. Ordoliberalism emphasises the role of the state in setting the rules of competition in the market (at national and/or EU level), while food sovereignty seeks to restore the leading role of the state as protector of the agricultural community (at the international level). The result and the conclusion are the same in both cases: the state must take an active role in shaping competition and trade rules. This does not mean direct intervention into the relationship of market participants but signifies establishing those competition and trade rules according to which these market participants operate in the marketplace.

By adopting the approach of ordoliberalism which goes beyond a single-purpose viewpoint towards competition law and by choosing the political category of food sovereignty as a possible conceptual framework in policy-making processes, I step on the path of prosocial antitrust/competition law.⁸⁰ By prosocial competition law I mean a mode of competition law legislation and enforcement in a broad sense which is sensitive to social issues and does not limit itself to achieving economic efficiency. By looking at the primary law of the European Union, Article 9 TFEU includes the horizontal social clause⁸¹ which requires that 'social values have to be respected in all policy fields of the EU'.⁸² Of the few *expressis verbis* provisions on resolving the conflicts between competition and

⁷⁵ See also: Ioannis Lianos, 'Competition Law as a Form of Social Regulation' (2020) 65 The Antitrust Bulletin 3, 9. (2020)

⁷⁶ See the keynote speech: Eleanor M Fox, Antitrust and Inequality: The History of (In) equality in Competition Law and Its Guide to the Future (Online conference titled Should Wealth and Income Inequality Be a Competition Law Concern? 20 May 2021).

⁷⁷ Windfuhr and Jonsén (n 6) 29.

⁷⁸ José Bové and Francois Dufour, *The World Is Not for Sale: Farmers Against Junk Food* (Verso 2001) 168.

⁷⁹ Hajer (n 1).

⁸⁰ The term has been taken over from *Miazad*. See: Amelia Miazad, 'Prosocial Antitrust' (2021) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3802194> accessed 14 July 2021).

⁸¹ Maria Eugenia Bartoloni, 'The Horizontal Social Clause in a Legal Dimension' in Francesca Ippolito, Maria Eugenia Bartoloni and Massimo Condinanzi (eds), *The EU and the Proliferation of Integration Principles under the Lisbon Treaty* (Routledge 2018) 83.

⁸² Andreas Heinemann, 'Social Considerations in EU Competition Law: The Protection of Competition as a Cornerstone of the Social Market Economy' in Delia Ferri and Fulvio Cortese (eds), *The EU Social Market Economy and the Law: Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Challenges for the EU* (Routledge 2019) 123.

another policy, the subject of my article, ie agriculture, is one which establishes the specific social objectives to be considered when adopting and enforcing competition laws in the form of the provision formulated in Article 42 TFEU.⁸³ As described later, Article 42 TFEU paves the way for the precedence of Common Agricultural Policy objectives over general competition rules.

The ordoliberal competition law objectives such as the protection of the competitive process and of individual freedom⁸⁴ are in themselves appropriate to consider non-economic factors when deciding whether a conduct is harmful to competition. The notion of prosocial competition law does not argue against the economic efficiency to be achieved by competition laws. The market reforms advocated by food sovereignty not only aim to address the problems of small farmers, but also of food consumers, 'especially low-income consumers'.⁸⁵

As a consequence of adopting a food sovereignty approach, one rejects that food be purely commodified,⁸⁶ and as a consequence of a socially responsive ordoliberal competition policy positioned in the framework of a social market economy, one can take into account those dimensions of competition and trade in agricultural products and food which would remain invisible from a more economic approach limited to the objective of enhancing consumer welfare. 'The commodification of food [...] has resulted in the vertical integration and the concentration of power in a few very large firms with national governments increasingly tailoring food regulation to the demands of agribusiness'.⁸⁷

The food sovereignty movement's demand to break the control and growing power of corporations over the food system⁸⁸ is fully in accordance with the thoughts of ordoliberalism's mainstream economist, Walter Eucken. As explained in one of his major works, the state's policy should be directed toward dissolving economic power groups or limiting their function.⁸⁹ It is not the only parallel which can be drawn between the key ordoliberal economist Eucken and food sovereignty: an overlap may also be found with regard to the requirement of contractual freedom. In Eucken's view, freedom of contract should not be used in the competitive

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Anchustegui (n 43) 139.

⁸⁵ Henry Bernstein, 'Food Sovereignty Via the "Peasant Way": A Sceptical View' (2014) 41 *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 1031, 1054.

⁸⁶ Using this term in the sense as adopted by Jeffrey R Oliver and Lindon J Robison, 'Rationalizing Inconsistent Definitions of Commodification: A Social Exchange Perspective' (2017) 8 *Modern Economy* 1314.

⁸⁷ Amy Trauger, 'Toward a Political Geography of Food Sovereignty: Transforming Territory, Exchange and Power in the Liberal Sovereign State' (2014) 41 *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 1131.

⁸⁸ William D Schanbacher, *Food as a Human Right: Combatting Global Hunger and Forging a Path to Food Sovereignty* (Praeger Security International 2019) 91.

⁸⁹ Walter Eucken, *Grundsätze der Wirtschaftspolitik* (JCB Mohr 1952) 334.

order to create dependencies between market players, that is, freedom of contract may not be granted for the purpose of concluding contracts that restrict or eliminate freedom of contract.⁹⁰ This tenet of Eucken may be a basis for regulating unfair trading practices in the food supply chain from an ordoliberal point of view, given that the UTPs, in most cases, constitute certain types of exploitative abuse which restrict the freedom of contract of that contracting party which is vis-à-vis the party having superior bargaining power. To be more exact, the weaker contracting party's freedom to determine the terms of the contract is restricted due to economic dependence, and so this party is put in a position which – from a food sovereignty approach – is unacceptable because of the economic exploitation.⁹¹ As put by Akman, the ordoliberal concept of efficiency also includes 'the continuing possibility of choice for the individual',⁹² of which the above-mentioned behaviours deprive the agricultural producers, who are vulnerable in cases of bargaining with buyers being in a superior bargaining position.

The characteristic of food sovereignty that it can be interpreted at all levels means that the movement's demand for ceasing unequal trading rules at the international level can be projected at the national and EU levels.⁹³ Ordoliberal competition policy and the social market economy constitute an appropriate framework to set up those competition and trade rules which take into account non-economic (social) factors to provide protection for the weakest actors of the food supply chain, the farmers as well as small and medium-size enterprises. The food sovereignty movement promoting social justice⁹⁴ may find a useful partner in ordoliberal competition policy to establish the set of rules necessary to provide protection for the most vulnerable of the food supply chain. On the one hand, this 'partner-in-crime' role of ordoliberalism comes from the view of ordoliberal thinkers who dealt with agriculture, and, on the other hand, even from the general constituting principles drawn up by Eucken.

6 Special competition-related laws of the agricultural and food sector

In this part I aim to take stock of, if there are any, those competition-related laws which provide for specific or exemption norms with regard to competition and trade in the agricultural and food sector. Exception norms are those provisions which deviate from the general norms because of the particular circumstances of agriculture, while specific norms are those provisions which are separately adopted for agriculture.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Windfuhr and Jonsén (n 6).

⁹² Akman (n 21).

⁹³ Bernstein (n 85).

⁹⁴ David M Kaplan (ed), *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics* (Springer 2019) 99.

⁹⁵ Christian Grimm, *Agrarrecht* (CH Beck 2004).

The reason for enumerating these laws is of paramount importance to my study. If there are agriculture-specific competition rules, it strengthens my standpoint that it is possible for competition policy to take into account sectoral characteristics. This would mean that other public policies, such as agricultural policy, may affect competition provisions and their enforcement. Of course, the aim of agricultural policy is not to achieve the highest possible economic efficiency but primarily to ensure a fair standard of living for those who are engaged in agricultural production. That is to say, if other public policies may play a role in adopting and enforcing competition rules applying to certain sectors, these public policies may hijack competition law from its narrow efficiency-based approach.

Reasonably, the differences between EU (polythematic as a consequence of ordoliberalism) and US (monothematic concentrating on consumer welfare) competition law goals would mean that the former jurisdiction has, while the latter jurisdiction has no, special competition-related laws applying to the agricultural and food sector. Nonetheless, the reality shows otherwise.

First, let us take a look at the EU, in particular the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (hereinafter: TFEU).⁹⁶ In principle, the EU defines its common agricultural and fisheries policy, which – according to Whish and Bailey – has its own philosophy.⁹⁷ The internal market extends to agriculture, fisheries and trade in agricultural products. Therefore, the common agricultural and fisheries policy is part of the internal market. Save as otherwise provided in Articles 39 to 44 TFEU, the rules laid down for the establishment and functioning of the internal market also apply to agricultural products. Rules on competition, being positioned from Article 101 to 109, form a part of the internal market. However, even since the beginning of European integration, European agricultural markets have not been fully exposed to free competition. Schweizer explains that the introduction of common competition rules for agricultural markets has a negative and a positive component. The negative component relates to the application of the competition rules of Articles 101 et seq TFEU to agriculture. The positive component opens the way for the European Parliament and the Council to independently regulate competition issues in the agricultural sector.⁹⁸

The basic system and derogation are provided by Article 42 TFEU which declares that the provisions of the Chapter relating to rules on competition apply to the production of and trade in agricultural products only to the extent determined by the European Parliament and the Council, account being taken of the objectives set out in Article 39. This

⁹⁶ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [2012] OJ C326/57.

⁹⁷ Richard Whish and David Bailey, *Competition Law* (OUP 2012) 963.

⁹⁸ Dieter Schweizer, 'Art 42 AEUV' in Torsten Körber, Heike Schweitzer and Daniel Zimmer (eds), *Wettbewerbsrecht*, vol 1 (CH Beck 2000).

provision establishes the primacy of agricultural policy over general competition law. Article 39 TFEU comprises the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy, which have to be taken into consideration when deciding on the extent of the application of competition rules to production and trade in agricultural products. The two key objectives for our topic are ensuring a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture, and the stabilisation of markets.

The possibility for derogations established by the TFEU is realised through Council Regulation (EC) No 1184/2006⁹⁹ and Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013, in particular through its Part IV on competition rules.¹⁰⁰ The former's scope *ratione materiae* covers those Annex-I products which are not covered by the latter. That is, these two secondary legal acts complement each other in terms of their material scope.

Let us take a look at the former. The two main derogations in relation to Article 101(1) TFEU, which provides for the general cartel prohibition, may be called upon when agreements, decisions and practices (a) form an integral part of a national market organisation; or (b) are necessary to attain the objectives set out in Article 39 TFEU.

Sentence 2 of Article 2(1) of Regulation (EC) No 1184/2006 also includes an example. The wording 'in particular' reflects the indicative/illustrative nature of the provision: in particular, Article 101(1) TFEU does not apply to agreements, decisions and practices of farmers, farmers' associations, or associations of such associations belonging to a single Member State which concern the production or sale of agricultural products or the use of joint facilities for the storage, treatment or processing of agricultural products. Nevertheless, there are also negative criteria determined as regards this provision. On the one hand, there is the absolute requirement that under the agreement, decision or practice of farmers, farmers' associations, or associations of such associations, there must be no obligation to charge identical prices, and, on the other hand, there are two further requirements formulated in an alternative relation to each other, and individually in a cumulative relation to the prohibition of charging identical prices. These two requirements are the following: (a) competition shall not be excluded, or (b) the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy shall not be jeopardised. This means that for an agreement, decision or practice to be exempted from Article 101(1) TFEU, the following prohibitions shall be respected cumulatively: (a) the prohibition on charging identical prices; (b) the prohibition on the exclusion of com-

⁹⁹ Consolidated text: Council Regulation (EC) No 1184/2006 of 24 July 2006 applying certain rules of competition to the production of and trade in certain agricultural products [2014] OJ L214/7.

¹⁰⁰ Consolidated text: Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 922/72, (EEC) No 234/79, (EC) No 1037/2001 and (EC) No 1234/2007 [2020] OJ L347/671.

petition; and (c) the prohibition of jeopardising CAP objectives. From a reversed point of view, it is sufficient to return to the application of Article 101(1) if any of the three above-mentioned prohibitions is violated. The Council Regulation does not affect the prohibition of abuse of a dominant position under 102 TFEU; this therefore applies in full in the agricultural sector.¹⁰¹

First and foremost, it is worth mentioning that the provisions of Regulation No 1184/2006 and Regulation No 1308/2013 are – in most aspects – identical. Although the core meaning of the exceptions formulated in these two regulations is the same, there are two small differences between the provisions. Pursuant to Article 2(1) of Regulation No 1184/2006, the cartel prohibition does not apply to agreements, decisions and practices of farmers, farmers' associations, or associations of such associations belonging to a single Member State. Regulation No 1308/2013 complements this list with producer organisations recognised under its Article 152 or Article 161, or associations of producer organisations recognised under its Article 156, but with regard to the associations of farmers' associations it does not mention the feature 'belonging to a single Member State'. This latter difference is hard to explain; however, the expansion of the list with producer organisations can be perceived as the concretisation of farmers' associations. Every producer organisation is a farmers' association but not every farmers' association is a producer organisation. The dividing line is whether the entity in question is recognised by a Member State in accordance with EU law. If it is, it is called a producer organisation, if not, it is called a farmers' association. This shows us that 'calling up' the exemption does not require recognition in the legal sense. Regulation No 1308/2013 also consists of rules applying to interbranch organisations. Contrariwise, when speaking of interbranch organisations, in order for them to use the exemption under the general cartel prohibition, they must be recognised. Recognition not only has general rules but also special rules for the milk and milk products sector and for the olive oil and table olives and tobacco sectors. There are five conditions determined which lead to the incompatibility of the agreements of interbranch organisations with EU law. Three of them are quite similar to the previously mentioned case of exception: the respective agreement, decision or concerted practice must not create distortions of competition which are not essential to achieving the objectives of the CAP pursued by the interbranch organisation activity (similar to the jeopardisation of CAP objectives); they must not entail the fixing of prices or the fixing of quotas (similar to charging identical prices); they must not create discrimination or eliminate competition in respect of a substantial proportion of the products in question (similar to the exclusion of competition). Besides these, the agreements, decisions and concerted practices must also not lead to the partitioning of markets within the Union in any

¹⁰¹ Ines Härtel, 'AEUV Art 42' in Rudolf Streinz (ed), *EU/EAUV – Vertrag über die Europäische Union, Vertrag über die Arbeitsweise der Europäischen Union, Charta der Grundrechte der Europäischen Union* (CH Beck. 2018).

form, and must not affect the sound operation of the market organisation.

Outside the toolbox of conventional competition law, additional protection in the form of specific norms provided for the weaker market participants in the food supply chain is achieved by Directive (EU) 2019/633.¹⁰² It prohibits certain unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain through a minimum harmonisation obligation of the Member States. Although I mentioned that the regulation on the abuse of dominance fully applies to agriculture, this Directive can be perceived as a complementary instrument (although with a totally different assessment method) to catch those unfair unilateral conducts which do not reach the intervention threshold necessary to enforce the provision on the abuse of dominance.

Although my previous findings on the compatibility of food sovereignty and the US antitrust regime do not imply that the US would have special competition-related laws to the agricultural and food sector, the reality is somewhat different. First, I have to commence with Section 6 of the Clayton Act of 1914.¹⁰³ It declares that nothing contained in the antitrust laws should be construed to forbid the existence and operation of agricultural or horticultural organisations, instituted for the purposes of mutual help. Section 6 is extended by the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922.¹⁰⁴ These two statutes provide for an exemption for agricultural cooperatives under antitrust laws, as in the European Union. Second, the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 is also worth emphasising. It is designed to ensure effective competition and integrity in livestock, meat, and poultry markets. Third, I must also mention the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act of 1930¹⁰⁵ and the Unfair Trade Practices Affecting Producers of Agricultural Products Act of 1968.¹⁰⁶ Though all of these laws were passed long before the consumer welfare approach became dominant from the 1980s and diverge from a horizontal and unified approach towards antitrust law, none of them have been repealed following the paradigm shift brought about by the Chicago School, despite the fact that they bring to the fore non-efficiency-based considerations. What is more, they have been enforced to the same extent as before the appearance of the consumer welfare paradigm, about which I have found that it is, to a significant extent, incompatible with the considerations of food sovereignty.

¹⁰² Directive (EU) 2019/633 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain [2019] OJ L111/59.

¹⁰³ 15 US Code § 17.

¹⁰⁴ 7 US Code §§ 291–292.

¹⁰⁵ 7 US Code §§ 499a–499t.

¹⁰⁶ 7 US Code §§ 2301–2306.

7 Conclusion

The article has aimed to introduce the notion of food sovereignty into the discourse of competition law and policy, as well as to theorise and conceptualise them in parallel with ordoliberalism. The study finds that an ordoliberal competition policy followed by the EU is suitable to take into account the competition-related elements of the food sovereignty definition, while the dominant consumer welfare approach of the US in the last four decades is not. However, this does not mean that the latter does not treat the agricultural and food sector relatively separately from its general antitrust regime. Regardless of the prevailing approach towards general competition/antitrust law, the agricultural and food sectors have maintained their relative independence which is underpinned by the special competition and trade-related laws of these sectors in both the EU and the US. The agrarian antitrust¹⁰⁷ of the US and an *europäisches Agrarwettbewerbsrecht*¹⁰⁸ can provide space for food sovereignty in the discourse of antitrust/competition law, which may bring with it the further protection of farmers and agricultural producers in an increasingly globalised market of agricultural and food products.

I agree with von Dietze's 80-year-old findings. The future of family farming (and, in general, that of agriculture) as well as the preservation of its rural character propagated by food sovereignty enthusiasts lies in consequently setting an economic policy according to the constituting and regulating principles of the competitive order. This order is not only against the monopolistic and oligopolistic trends taking place downstream in the food supply chain at the level of processing and retailing, but also stands up for freedom of contract which should not be used to create dependencies between market players, because these dependencies may result in unfair trading practices against agricultural producers. Although the theoretical foundations are given at the level of the European Union, the realisation of the competitive order fails in many cases. However, this can be achieved by improving the law enforcement by taking a prosocial approach towards competition laws, which does not limit itself to economic considerations but is open to the core elements of food sovereignty. At a theoretical level, the notion of the social market economy propagated by ordoliberals and being part of the EU's primary law is suitable for this, thereby leaving room for a more humane competition law sensitive to the main considerations emphasised by food sovereignty enthusiasts. This may provide a level of protection for European agricultural producers to help them overcome problems arising from increasingly globalised markets and their symptoms coming to the fore

¹⁰⁷ Jon Lauck, 'Toward an Agrarian Antitrust: A New Direction for Agricultural Law' (1999) 75 North Dakota Law Review, 449.

¹⁰⁸ See the term: Walter Frenz, 'Agrarwettbewerbsrecht' (2010) 40 Agrar- und Umweltrecht 193; Ines Härtel, '§ 7 Agrarrecht' in Mathias Ruffert (ed), *Europäisches Sektorales Wirtschaftsrecht* (Nomos Verlag 2013) 437; Härtel (n 101); Ines Härtel, 'Agrarrecht' in Matthias Ruffert (ed), *Europäisches Sektorales Wirtschaftsrecht* (Nomos Verlag 2020) 463.

in the form of increasing market concentration and consolidation. Preserving the character of European agriculture which has several precious functions beyond food production is a policy choice and value decision. At a theoretical level, the framework of a social market economy in general and that of an EU competition policy in particular is suitable and appropriate for this. Policy-makers should not even break with and disrupt the tradition of ordoliberal competition policy and European agriculture. The framework can be filled with such content which continues to be in accordance with our common past and understanding, both in terms of competition policy and of agriculture.



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INTERNATIONAL JURISDICTION AND THE LAW APPLICABLE TO DISPUTES ARISING FROM INFRINGEMENT OF THE RIGHT TO A TRADE NAME AS AN INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY RIGHT

Helena Pullmannová*

Abstract: This article answers the following questions: (i) In the courts of which state may the injured trader whose right to a trade name has been infringed sue the infringers? (ii) May the injured trader sue the infringer for damages in their entirety (even in the part originating in the territory of other states)? (iii) What law is applicable to disputes arising from infringement of (or threat to) the right to a trade name in non-contractual obligations? (iv) May a choice be made of the law applicable to the disputes? (v) How may a number of applicable legal systems in the case of an infringement of the right to a trade name affecting the territory of more than one country be dealt with? In particular, the article discusses the various criteria contained in the Brussels I bis Regulation, the Rome II Regulation, Czech private international law (outside the mentioned regulations), and CJEU case law in this area, while emphasising the nature of the right to a trade name as an unregistered industrial property right. Finally, the article focuses on the issue of the qualification problem of the factual situation in international law.

Keywords: right to a trade name, non-contractual obligation, international jurisdiction, applicable law, dépeçage.

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1 Introduction

Building a good trade name¹ (the name under which a trader carries out his business in a given area)² costs the trader effort, time, and money. Parasitism on this designation is thus unwelcome to its holders, and in a situation where the trader's rights to a trade name are being infringed, it is important to know (i) in the courts of which state the injured trader may seek protection if he operates in the territory of several Member States of the EU, (ii) whether the designated court may decide on the claim for damages in full (ie also on damages incurred in the territory of other states), and (iii) which law will be used for assessing the eligibility of claims under non-contractual³ obligations.

These issues are discussed mainly in terms of the Brussels I bis Regulation, the Rome II Regulation, and Czech private international law⁴ (outside the mentioned regulations).⁵ The criteria given here relevant to proceedings for infringement of (or threat to) the right to a trade name in non-contractual obligations are interpreted in the light of CJEU case law.

In addition, this article is prefaced by a general consideration of the importance of classifying the conduct in question under the category of non-contractual obligations arising from infringement of the right to a trade name as an industrial property right. This is crucial for the correct determination of the internationally competent courts of a particular state to enforce the rights of the injured party and the law applicable to these proceedings.

¹ For this article, the right to a trade name means the right to the designation of a trader, regardless of whether or not he is registered in a public (official) registry. In the context of Czech law, this is the right to the designation of trader according to Sec 8 of Act no 513/1991 Coll, Commercial Code, as amended until 31 December 2000 (see below). See also the interpretation of 'trade name' in Martin Boháček, 'Trade Name' in Dušan Hendrych et al (eds) *Právnícký slovník* (CH Beck 2009). However, there is no absolute agreement on the definition of the term 'trade name' and this term is thus subject to interpretation under the law of the country in which protection is sought (*lex fori*). See Pierre Jean Pointet, 'Der internationale Schutz des berühmten Handelsnamens' (1961) 10(8-9) GRUR International 393; Yves Saint-Gal, 'Der internationale Schutz des Handelsnamens' (1964) 13(6) GRUR International 289; Georg Hendrik Christiaan Bodenhausen, *Guide to the Application of the Paris Convention of Industrial Property: As revised at Stockholm in 1967* (BIRPI 1968) 23, 133.

² See Case C-17/06 *Céline SARL v Céline SA* ECLI:EU:C:2007:497, para 21. In relation to trade name in the context of Czech law, see also Case *TENERGO Brno, a s v Team ENERGO, s r o* ECLI:CZ:NS:2017:31.CDO.3375.2015.1.

³ The issues arising in cases of contractual infringement of the right to a trade name are not addressed in the article.

⁴ Which will be used, for example, in the cases where the defendant is not domiciled in the EU, and in a hypothetical case where the Czech courts, as an internationally competent court for hearing and deciding the dispute, would determine the applicable law not according to the Rome II regulation. See also n 8.

⁵ For the absence of regulation by legal rules with direct method of regulation.

2 Classification of an infringed right as an industrial property right

It is necessary to realise that by jurisprudence⁶ the right to a trade name is seen as an (absolute) right to industrial property and not a right to a legal entity name or a right to a natural person's name (when their meaning and purpose are to designate a person not only in relation to their business), although the designations to which these rights may apply in certain cases may be identical. Distinguishing this is very important with respect to the issues we examine (see below).

First, if any right is infringed, it is necessary to legally classify⁷ this unlawful factual situation according to the method of qualification preferred by the legal system in the context of which we address this issue.

However, in most cases⁸ we will not use the rules of private international law of the majority of Member States for the purposes of determining the internationally competent court and the law applicable to the set of disputes we are considering. The aforementioned area of law is governed by EU regulations that have normative effect (Article 288 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU))⁹ and whose basic feature is priority of application¹⁰ over national legislation. At the same time, the terms mentioned in these regulations must be interpreted autonomously,¹¹ ie without 'encumbrance' by the manner of interpretation of the terms according to the law of a specific Member State.¹²

⁶ See Tereza Kyselovská and Pavel Koukal, *Mezinárodní právo soukromé a právo duševního vlastnictví – kolizní otázky* (Masaryk University 2019) 222; Johann Neethling, 'Personality Rights: A Comparative Overview' (2005) 38(2) *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa* 241; Paul Lange (ed), *International Trade Mark and Signs Protection: A Handbook* (CH Beck 2010); Carlos Maria Correa, *Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights: A Commentary on the TRIPS Agreement* (OUP 2007) 33–34, 487; Case C-17/06 *Céline SARL v Céline SA* ECLI:EU:C:2007:497, para 21; Art 2, point viii) of the Convention Establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization; United International Bureaux for the Protection of Intellectual Property, *Model Law for Developing Countries on Marks, Trade Names, and Acts of Unfair Competition* (BIRPI 1967) Section 1, 47–48.

⁷ Naděžda Rozehnalová et al, *Úvod do mezinárodního práva soukromého* (Wolters Kluwer 2017) 86–88.

⁸ For the question of determining the internationally competent court, this will mainly concern situations where the defendant is not domiciled in the EU, and for the question of determining the law applicable to a dispute, it will mainly concern situations where the qualified unlawful act took place before the entry into force of the Rome II Regulation for the EU state dealing with this question. For exceptions to the application of EU regulations, see also below.

⁹ See also Michal Tomášek et al, *Právo evropské unie* (Leges 2017) 94–95, 107–108.

¹⁰ See Case C-6/64 *Flaminio Costa v ENEL* ECLI:EU:C:1964:66.

¹¹ For an interpretation of the EU regulations, see Ulrich Magnus and Peter Mankowski (eds), *Rome II Regulation (European Commentaries on Private International Law)* (Sellier 2019) 22–30.

¹² See Case C-327/82 *Ekro BV Vee- en Vleeshandel v Produktschap voor Vee en Vlees* ECLI:EU:C:1984:11, para 11; Case C-287/98 *Grand Duchy of Luxemburg v Berthe Linster, Aloyse Linster and Yvonne Linster* ECLI:EU:C:2000:468, para 43.

The autonomous qualification of infringement within the framework of the rules of EU law thus takes precedence over the qualification according to the rules of the substantive law of a Member State. This means that even in those cases where a certain illegal act would be qualified according to the substantive law of a Member State as an act not infringing the 'right to a trade name' of a trader, because such a right is not recognised by the legal order of that Member State, we will still use for the question of determining the internationally competent court and of the law applicable to a dispute arising from a violation of 'this right' the rules of EU law dealing with cases of infringement of intellectual property rights.¹³ According to the autonomous interpretation of the term 'right to a trade name', we will come to the conclusion that the right to a trade name is perceived by the EU legislator as the right to industrial property.¹⁴ However, the specific content of this right is determined by the national legal systems of Member States with regard to the territoriality principle of intellectual property rights.

In order to illustrate the consequences of the incorrect classification of an infringement in individual national legal systems, let us leave aside for the moment the existence of EU regulation in this area and treat the legal systems of Member States in the model case below as the legal systems of non-Member States.

To be able to classify the factual situation, we must determine the probable courts of the state for resolving this dispute according to the subsumption of the factual situation under the relevant rules of private international law of the state within whose territory an action for the protection of the infringed right should be brought. *De facto*, it is necessary to carry out an initial (working) qualification of the factual situation (eg from the perspective of the law of the injured party's statutory seat) and to determine which courts have jurisdiction for such qualified (illegal) conduct. The conclusion reached in this way (about the jurisdiction of the courts of a certain state) is then verified in the context of the legal order of the state whose courts we have determined to be internationally competent, whether our initial qualification was correct (ie whether the state's *lex fori* law views the infringer's conduct as conduct infringing the right to a trade name as well).¹⁵ In other words, whether the courts of that state have jurisdiction under *lex fori* rules.

¹³ In other words, even in situations where Czech law does not grant the 'right to a trade name' to an unregistered trader as the right to industrial property to his subject designation, we will use the rules of EU law to determine the internationally competent court and the law applicable to a dispute over the violation of 'this right' that deals with cases of infringement of intellectual property rights.

¹⁴ See Case C-245/02 *Anheuser-Busch Inc v Budějovický Budvar, národní podnik* ECLI:EU:C:2004:717, para 91; Case C-112/21 *X BV v Classic Coach Company vof and Others* ECLI:EU:C:2022:428, paras 37, 41; and n 62.

¹⁵ Catherine Kessedjian, 'Current International Developments in Choice of Law: An Analysis of the ALI Draft' in Jürgen Basedow et al (eds), *Intellectual Property in the Conflict of Law* (Mohr Siebeck 2005) 24; Michal Malacka and Lukáš Ryšavý, *Mezinárodní právo soukromé: zásady obecné a zvláštní části* (Leges 2019) 43–44.

There may be several problems in the outlined (reasoning) procedure. Let us take a model case:

In the territory of Poland, the right to the trade name of a Slovak trader is affected by the unauthorised use of the designation 'Peter Čiko - Čičí koffi' by a Czech trader (from the perspective of Slovak law). The Slovak trader wants to seek protection of his right and brings a negative and restitutive action against the Czech trader in the Czech Republic (in the courts of the country in which the infringer is domiciled). However, when bringing the action, the Slovak trader is unpleasantly surprised, because according to Czech law (the law applicable to the final qualification, although the law applicable to assessing the validity of the claims would be Polish law according to the *lex loci protectionis* rule) he has no trade-name right to the designation 'Peter Čiko - Čičí koffi' as an unregistered designation in the Czech Commercial Register, as such a right is not recognised by Czech law.¹⁶ His claim will therefore be qualified by the Czech court as a claim for infringement of unfair competition rules. It is irrelevant whether or not the trade name of a foreign trader enjoys protection in the country of origin.¹⁷ This fact could lead to a different conclusion on the jurisdiction of the courts of the state if, according to Czech private international law, the courts of the state in whose territory the competition was affected were competent to decide disputes arising from unfair competition rules. However, this is not the case, and the Czech court is entitled to hear and decide the dispute.

This case is intended to demonstrate a situation where, in terms of initial qualification, we can conclude that it is a non-contractual infringement of an industrial property right, but from the perspective of the subsequent qualification according to *lex fori* rules (or according to the qualification method of the determined court) it is possible that that jurisdiction does not prove that the state and the plaintiff will be referred to the courts of another state. Similarly, a situation may arise where, from the point of view of initial qualification, we conclude that there has (only) been a violation of unfair competition rules, but in terms of the qualification according to *lex fori* rules, we finally conclude that this is an infringement of an unregistered industrial property right and the court will state that it has no jurisdiction to decide on the matter.

¹⁶ The term 'trade name' was used in Czech law until 1 January 2001 when it was replaced by 'corporate name' in Sec 8 of the Commercial Code. Currently, the protection of the right to a trade name is narrowed in the territory of the Czech Republic because this right (as with the right to a corporate name) was newly granted only to traders registered in the Commercial Register and not to all traders (for the current legislation, see Sec 423 et seq of Act no 89/2012 Coll, Civil Code, as amended). It follows that the term 'right to a trade name' is a broader term in Czech law than the term 'right to a corporate name', as it includes the right to the designation of traders both registered and unregistered in the Commercial Register. See Helena Pullmannová, 'Právo k obchodnímu jménu zahraničního podnikatele na území České republiky v mezinárodních souvislostech' (2020) 28(6) Právní rozhledy 216.

¹⁷ Karl-Heinz Fezer, 'PVÜ Art 8 Handelsname' in Karl-Heinz Fezer, *Markenrecht. Kommentar zum Markengesetz, zur Pariser Verbandsübereinkunft und zum Madrider Markenabkommen* (CH Beck 2009).

It follows from the above that it is important to be aware of the non-binding nature of the working qualification and the decisive influence of the (final) qualification according to *lex fori* rules in resolving the question in the courts of which state the injured trader is to seek protection. Moreover, in classifying a specific infringement to bring it within the scope of the rules of EU law, we must also take into account the need for an autonomous interpretation of the terms contained in those rules.¹⁸

Similarly, the qualification of the factual situation also plays a key role in determining the law applicable to disputes arising from non-contractual infringements of the right to a trade name. To determine the applicable law, according to which the foreign trader can claim the protection of the right to a trade name (and thus also to determine what claims the foreign trader has at his disposal),¹⁹ it is decisive whether, in classifying the law in question, we conclude that it is a 'trade name right' within the meaning of the (absolute) industrial right under *lex fori* rules (the law under which we qualify),²⁰ or whether only unfair competition rules were violated, as according to this legal order the designation of a trader is provided with protection only through the legal regulation of unfair competition.²¹ This is because the conclusion on the classification of the infringed right is crucial for the correct determination of the conflict rule referring to the law applicable to the dispute, and the connecting factors of these conflict rules do not have to be the same, nor do they have to lead to the same applicable law.

With regard to trade name rights, it is important to mention Article 8 of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property (Paris Convention), which obliges the Contracting States²² (ie most countries²³) of this multilateral international treaty to provide protection in their territory to the trade names of foreign traders²⁴ in a manner at least iden-

¹⁸ Rozehnalová et al (n 7) 93–95.

¹⁹ Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 166–169, 236–237.

²⁰ For the conclusion on majority choice of the mentioned method of qualification as the primary method in (especially continental) legal systems, see Malacka and Ryšavý (n 15) 43–44; Kessedjian (n 15) 24.

²¹ See Malacka and Ryšavý (n 15) 47–48.

²² The basis of the members of the Paris Convention represents only a part of the states to which its (substantive) Articles 1–12 and 19 are binding, because these articles are also the content of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which is Annex 1C to the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization. At the same time, every state that is a member of the World Trade Organization is obliged to comply with the above articles of the Paris Convention. The European Union has also been a member of the World Trade Organization since 1 January 1995.

²³ For the list of contracting states to the Paris Convention itself, see 'WIPO-Administered Treaties. Contracting Parties – Paris Convention' <https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/treaties/ShowResults?search_what=C&treaty_id=2> accessed 15 May 2022.

²⁴ Those who are nationals of Contracting States to the Paris Convention (or the TRIPS) or have their domicile or establishment (based on personnel) in the territory of those countries (Art 3 of the Paris Convention). See KarlHeinz Fezer, 'PVÜ Art 3 Erweiterung sed Schutzbereichs' in Karl-Heinz Fezer, *Markenrecht. Kommentar zum Markengesetz, zur Pariser Verbandsübereinkunft und zum Madrider Markenabkommen* (CH Beck 2009).

tical²⁵ to that which provides protection for the rights to trade names of (similar)²⁶ domestic traders (Article 2(1)). It is irrelevant whether or not the trade name of a foreign trader in the country of origin enjoys protection.²⁷ Conclusions by jurisprudence (and others)²⁸ vary on the question as to whether this protection should be based on the granting of the absolute (industrial) right to the trade name (of the foreign trader), or whether it is sufficient only to protect these assets (designations used in business relations by traders) through unfair competition rules.²⁹

However, based on a systematic and historical-teleological interpretation of the Paris Convention, it can be concluded that the intention of the parties to the Paris Convention was to protect the right to a trade name of (foreign) traders with industrial property rights and not only by prohibiting unfair competition.³⁰ Article 8 has been part of the Paris Convention since its inception and has not changed throughout its existence. The Paris Convention itself contains an obligation elsewhere to (also) protect industrial property rights in the territory of its Contracting States with unfair competition rules (Articles 1(2), 9, and 10bis). If we conclude that the right to a trade name is sufficiently protected even if it is granted protection under unfair competition rules, we could say straightaway that Article 8 of the Paris Convention is superfluous; in other words, there would be no real reason for its existence. Moreover, in the case of Article 5quinquies and Article 6sexies of the Paris Convention, which are similar in wording to Article 8, it is beyond doubt that the intangible assets referred to here are to be protected by industrial property rights.

²⁵ On the national (assimilation) principle of treatment, see Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 127–128.

²⁶ On the question of the qualification of a foreign person as a ‘trader’ from the point of view of the substantive rules of *lex fori* law, see *mutatis mutandis* Franz Jürgen Säcker et al, *Münchener Kommentar zum Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch. Band 13. Teil 10. Internationales Handels- und Gesellschaftsrecht [Kaufleute, Juristische Personen und Gesellschaften]* (CH Beck 2021) 159–164.

²⁷ Fezer (n 24).

²⁸ To illustrate the significance of this issue, it can be stated that in Slovakia (Sections 8 and 12 of Act no 513/1991 Coll, Commercial Code, as amended; Decision of the Supreme Court of Slovakia of 13 December 2019, 1 Ndob 12/2019) and Germany (Art 5 and 15 Gesetzes über den Schutz von Marken und sonstigen Kennzeichen (Markengesetz); BGBl. I S 3082) protection is provided for the rights to trade names of foreign traders as industrial property rights, which, however, does not preclude simultaneously seeking protection through unfair competition rules, or through the protection of personal rights. *Vice versa* in Switzerland (Art 157 Abs 2 Bundesgesetzes über das Internationale Privatrecht (IPRG); AS 1988 1776) and Austria (Art 34 Abs 1 Bundesgesetzes über das internationale Privatrecht (IPR-Gesetz); BGBl Nr 304/1978 and Art 9 Bundesgesetzes gegen den unlauteren Wettbewerb 1984 – UWG; BGBl Nr 448/1984) these rights are protected only through unfair competition rules or through the protection of personal rights if they are not registered in the Commercial Register.

²⁹ In favour of protection as an industrial property right, see José Oliveira Ascensao ‘Die Anwendung von Art 8 der Pariser Verbandsübereinkunft auf Länder, in denen der Handelsname eintragungspflichtig ist’ (1996) 45(4) GRUR International 413. In contrast, see Decision of the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland of 1 January 1953, 79 II 305; A Troller, ‘Der Schutz des ausländischen Handelsnames nach schweizerischem Recht’ (1957) 6(8–9) GRUR International 336.

³⁰ Similarly, Ascensao (n 29).

Based on this, the author makes a presumption at this point that the right to a trade name is protected in the territory of the place of *forum* by an industrial property right.³¹ For this reason, in the following text, significantly less attention is paid to the conflict-of-law rules determining the internationally competent courts and the applicable law for disputes arising from the violation of unfair competition rules.

However, it is true that in disputes concerning the infringement of the injured party, the trader often asserts both claims arising from the infringement of his industrial property rights (if any) and from the infringement of unfair competition rules. Thus, for the sake of completeness, in some places this article also briefly refers to the conflict-of-law legislation dealing with issues of violating unfair competition rules, but does not discuss it in detail. It should be borne in mind that the conflict-of-law rules under which we classify the potential infringements of the plaintiff's rights may lead us to conclude that, for part of the action (to the extent to which the plaintiff claims infringement of his right to the trade name), the courts of State A may be internationally competent and the law of State X can be applicable; however, for another part of the action (to the extent that the plaintiff claims infringement of unfair competition rules), the courts of State B may be internationally competent and the law of State Y can be applicable. It is necessary to assess those parts of the action (claims) separately.

3 Decisive criteria for determining forum

In the case of using EU rules for the determination of courts in disputes arising from the infringement of industrial property rights, or in the case of the application of the Brussels I bis Regulation, the above-mentioned *qualification problem* does not arise as, in the case of disputes arising from non-contractual obligations, the Brussels I bis Regulation does not contain any special rule in this respect which should take precedence over general rules determining courts in non-contractual disputes with an international element (see below).

So, what must the trader know, or find out, in order to correctly identify the courts of the state in which he can seek protection against the infringer of his right to a trade name (such as industrial property rights)?

The territory in which a foreign trader, whose right to a trade name has been infringed (or threatened), develops his business activity is most likely not the decisive factor for determining internationally competent courts from the perspective of the law of a Member State. Instead, the de-

³¹ Ascensao (n 29); Pointet (n 1). However, see Bodenhausen (n 1) 134; Fritz Schönherr 'Obersten Gerichtshofs 02.12.1975 4 Ob 349/75 "Transakta"' (1976) 27(11) GRUR International 500; Decision of the Supreme Court of Austria of 8 May 1984, 4 Ob 326/84.

termining factor would be where the infringer of the said right resides.³² It is a manifestation of the classic *actor sequitur forum rei* principle, ie that the plaintiff follows the defendant to his court.³³

It is most likely that we will use the Brussels I bis Regulation to determine the courts with jurisdiction if the conditions for its application³⁴ are met (ie personal, material, temporal, and territorial jurisdiction; see Articles 1, 4, 25, 26, and 81).³⁵

However, in the territory of Member States, the rules of international origin could take precedence over the Brussels I bis Regulation, which would regulate the issue we examine in a *lex specialis* position *vis-à-vis* the Brussels I bis Regulation, even if these rules were concluded exclusively between the Member States (Article 71(1)). The existence of such international agreements must always be verified on a case-by-case basis.

Other international agreements concluded between Member States and non-Member States may only be used in preference to the Brussels I bis Regulation in relations between a Member State and a non-Member State, not between two or more Member States (Article 351(1) TFEU).³⁶ Nor does the Brussels I bis Regulation affect the applicability of bilateral conventions and agreements concluded between a Member State and a non-Member State before 1 March 2002 in matters covered by the Brussels I bis Regulation (Article 73(3)).

In cases of the application of the *lex fori* rules of private international law which would not lead to the application of the Brussels I bis Regulation (for example in a situation where the infringer is not domiciled in the EU or in applying the law of a non-Member State), the premise made above can also be debated as to whether the location of the infringer is a decisive factor in determining the jurisdiction of a state. In specific cases, the relevant legal norms may also use other factors as determining criteria.

In the following parts of this paper, however, the author only deals with the Brussels I bis Regulation as a set of rules of private internation-

³² See Case C-412/98 *Group Josi Reinsurance Company SA v Universal General Insurance Company (UGIC)* ECLI:EU:C:2000:399, paras 52, 55, 57, 62.

³³ Ulrich Magnus and Peter Mankowski (eds), *Brussels I Regulation (European Commentaries on Private International Law)* (Sellier 2007) 71, 94, 193; Toshiyuki Kono (ed), *Intellectual Property and Private International Law. Comparative Perspectives* (Hart Publishing 2012) 24–26; Naděžda Rozehnalová et al, *Mezinárodní právo soukromé Evropské unie* (2nd edn, Wolters Kluwer 2018) 181.

³⁴ In relation to Denmark, we apply the Brussels I bis Regulation according to the Agreement between the European Community and the Kingdom of Denmark on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters from 2013.

³⁵ In disputes arising from non-contractual infringement of the right to a trade name as an unregistered right to industrial property, we do not assume the application of Arts 18(1), 21(2) and 24 of the Brussels I bis Regulation.

³⁶ See also Arts 64–68 of the Convention on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters from Lugano of 30 October 2007.

al law which we apply in most disputes arising from the violation of the right to a trade name occurring in the EU or, more precisely, before the courts of Member States.

The residence (domicile) criterion is set out in Article 4(1) of the Brussels I bis Regulation. The following conclusions must be considered while interpreting it.

To determine the residence of a *natural person* as the infringer, the designated court will apply the law of the state in which the natural person is domiciled (Article 62).

To determine the residence of a *legal person* as the infringer, it is necessary to proceed from an autonomous interpretation of Article 63 of the Brussels I bis Regulation, which calculates the possibilities for the legal person to be domiciled in a particular state. These are situations where the person has in the country his: (i) statutory seat (in the sense of an office stated in the registry); (ii) central administration, ie the company's key management or main governing bodies; or (iii) principal place of business, ie the centre of its economic, industrial, and commercial interests, or the place from which most of the company's business relations are managed, or the place where most of the company's employees perform their work and where its assets are located.³⁷

It follows, *inter alia*, that the determination of the infringer's domicile falls *de facto* at the same time as the conclusion on the application of the Brussels I bis Regulation in the scope of his personal competence (ie that the defendant is domiciled in the EU) if we do not proceed on the assumption of the application of the Brussels I bis Regulation on the basis of Article 25, which regulates the possible prorogation of the parties to the dispute, and Article 26, which deals with tacit prorogation (see below).

Therefore, if we have determined the basic criterion (the residence of the infringer) for determining the state whose courts have jurisdiction to resolve the dispute, we can apply specific legal rules of the Brussels I bis Regulation determining jurisdiction to the resolution of our set of disputes.

The basic rule for determining the internationally competent courts of the Brussels I bis Regulation is Article 4(1) thereof, which reflects the basic principle of *actor sequitur forum rei*. As an alternative to this rule, the injured trader may use the rule set out in Article 7(2). However, it is up to the plaintiff to decide which of these rules he prefers when bringing an action.³⁸ He can choose between the courts of the states in which (i) the defendant is domiciled (see above), or (ii) in which a harmful event has occurred or is likely to occur – which covers the *commissi delicti* place

³⁷ Peter Stone, *Private International Law in the European Union* (Edward Elgar 2018) 101–103.

³⁸ It is a legitimate discretionary area for the plaintiff to decide which *lex fori* rules of the potential applicable jurisdictions would be more favourable to him in the event of an action being brought (*forum shopping*). See Malacka and Ryšavý (n 15) 48–49.

as well as *damni infecti* places.³⁹ But the place of subsequent pecuniary damage caused by the original damage is not included in the criterion set out in the second place.⁴⁰

The plaintiff may even proceed to apply the rule laid down in Article 7(2) even if the designated court has not established that the infringer – a national of a Member State – (i) would be domiciled outside the territory of the EU, and (i) would be resident in a Member State; in these cases, the infringer is treated as if he were a resident in the EU, but it is not possible to identify him precisely (and thus use the rules in Article 4(1) of the Brussels I bis Regulation).⁴¹

The concept of a harmful event, which is the (further) determining criterion of Article 7(2) in addition to the place of residence of the infringer in the EU, must be interpreted autonomously and considering the evolving CJEU case law on this issue.

A harmful event can occur due to a breach of a protected interest (in our case, the right to a trade name) on the Internet in many countries at the same time.⁴² Here, according to CJEU case law, the courts designated as having jurisdiction in a dispute over infringement of the right to a trade name by a *delicti commissi* place could rule on the trader's claim for damages in several countries (ie the damage in its entirety), but the courts designated as competent according to the *damni infecti* place could (only) decide on the trader's claim for damages incurred in the territory of that particular state, since there is not a sufficiently close relationship in terms of the damage which has arisen elsewhere to justify a departure from the *actor sequitur forum rei* principle.⁴³

However, since the CJEU case law in the field of intellectual property rights does not require the infringement in question to be in any way 'targeted at the territory of the state' in which the damage occurred through an infringement of the trader's right (where the *damni infecti* place is located),⁴⁴ there can be many such places, or, to be precise, as many as there are countries where (i) the right to a trade name belongs to the injured party, (ii) the infringement in question is available via the

³⁹ See Case C-21/76 *Handelskwekerij GJ Bier BV v Mines de potasse d'Alsace SA* ECLI:EU:C:1976:166.

⁴⁰ See Case C-364/93 *Antonio Marinari v Lloyds Bank plc and Zubaidi Trading Company* ECLI:EU:C:1995:289, paras 14–21; Case C-27/17 *AB 'flyLAL-Lithuanian Airlines' v Starptautiskā lidosta 'Rīga' VAS and 'Air Baltic Corporation' AS* ECLI:EU:C:2018:533, para 32.

⁴¹ See Case C-292/10 *G v Cornelius de Visser* ECLI:EU:C:2012:142, paras 37–42.

⁴² What criteria may be decisive for concluding whether a particular designation has been used in the territory of a particular state, if the designation in question is used on the Internet, is analysed in Arts 2 and 3 of the 'Joint Recommendation Concerning Provisions on the Protection of Marks, and Other Industrial Property Rights in Signs, on the Internet (with Explanatory Notes)' <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_845.pdf> accessed 15 May 2022.

⁴³ See Case C-68/93 *Fiona Shevill, Ixora Trading Inc, Chequepoint SARL and Chequepoint International Ltd v Presse Alliance SA* ECLI:EU:C:1995:61.

⁴⁴ See Case C-170/12 *Peter Pinckney v KDG Mediatech AG* ECLI:EU:C:2013:635, para 43.

Internet, and (iii) damage as a result of the availability of the infringement in question has occurred.⁴⁵

Claiming protection of the right to a trade name can be disproportionately time-consuming and economically demanding for the traders in these cases if they decide to go with (several) *damni infecti* places, and therefore it can be expected that if the injured trader uses the opportunity to sue the infringers pursuant to Article 7(2) of the Brussels I bis Regulation, he will prefer the designation of the court according to the *delicti commissi* place.⁴⁶

Later, due to case law, the plaintiff's procedural possibilities were supplemented by other possible courts, namely the courts of the state in whose territory the injured party has a 'centre of interests', and these courts can (also) decide on the entire claim for damages – including damages caused in the territory of other states.⁴⁷ However, this criterion is highly unpredictable and deviates from the hitherto held view (emphasising legal certainty and restrictive interpretation of exceptions to the *actor sequitur forum rei* principle) by both the doctrine and the CJEU itself, and thus has been subject to considerable jurisprudential criticism.⁴⁸

Dissent of the jurisprudence was considered by the CJEU in the *Wintersteiger* decision, stating that the 'victim's centre of interest' as the criterion would be inappropriate in disputes over infringements of registered intellectual property rights when it was created in the context of the protection of personality rights in all Member States without the need for a formal act.⁴⁹ However, since the right to a trade name is a right with an informal moment of origin, the author is inclined to believe that this criterion can be used in cases of the infringement of the right to a trade name as an unregistered intellectual property right.⁵⁰ In accordance with CJEU case law, the centre of interests of the injured party would then be understood to be the place of the plaintiff's 'main economic activity' as the injured trader.⁵¹

⁴⁵ See Case C-441/13 *Pez Hejduk v EnergieAgentur.NRW GmbH* ECLI:EU:C:2015:28.

⁴⁶ See Tobias Lutz, 'Internet Cases in EU Private International Law: Developing a Coherent Approach' (2017) 66(3) *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 691–693.

⁴⁷ See Case C-509/09 *eDate Advertising GmbH and Others v X and Société MGN LIMITED* ECLI:EU:C:2011:685.

⁴⁸ See Jaroslav Králíček, 'Prosazování práv k duševnímu vlastnictví a pravomoc dle nařízení Brusel I' (Masaryk University 2013) 157–160, 180–182 <https://theses.cz/id/z9cad6/?zoomy_is=0> accessed 15 May 2022; Tereza Kyselovská, 'Mezinárodní příslušnost soudů ve sporech z porušení práv právnické osoby zveřejněním údajně nesprávných informací na internetu' (2017) 16(8) *Revue pro právo a technologie* 116 (incl literature).

⁴⁹ See Case C-523/10 *Wintersteiger AG v Products 4U Sondermaschinenbau GmbH* ECLI:EU:C:2012:220, paras 23–25; Case C-194/16 *Bolagsupplysningen OÜ and Ingrid Ilsjan v Svensk Handel AB* ECLI:EU:C:2017:766; Case C-800/19 *Mittelbayerischer Verlag KG v SM* ECLI:EU:C:2021:489.

⁵⁰ Králíček (n 48) 167–168, 182; see Case C-194/16 *Bolagsupplysningen OÜ and Ingrid Ilsjan v Svensk Handel AB* ECLI:EU:C:2017:766.

⁵¹ See Case C-194/16 *Bolagsupplysningen OÜ and Ingrid Ilsjan v Svensk Handel AB* ECLI:EU:C:2017:766, para 41.

With regard to the delimitation of the application of Article 7(1) and (2) of the Brussels I bis Regulation, it may be stated that in cases where the infringer expressly undertakes an obligation, for example in a licence agreement, he does not infringe the right to a trade name in countries other than those in which he acquired the right to use the designation (thus licensed) from the other party, and the breach of this obligation may be subsumed under Article 7(1); in other cases, it will be a non-contractual obligation and we apply Article 7(2).⁵² A third option is not given.⁵³

As indicated above, the condition of the defendant's domicile in a Member State, for the application of the Brussels I bis Regulation, need not be met if there is a substantive (prorogation) agreement between the parties to the dispute as to which courts of a Member State will have jurisdiction to discuss and decide the dispute (Article 25 of the Brussels I bis Regulation). The substantive validity of such an agreement is assessed in accordance with the law of the state in which the dispute is to be settled (Recital 20 of the Brussels I bis Regulation). In this case, the Brussels I bis Regulation applies regardless of the place of residence of the infringer (defendant).

Article 26 of the Brussels I bis Regulation, which refers to 'tacit prorogation', leads to a similar result, meaning that the defendant voluntarily participates in proceedings before a court which, under other rules of the Brussels I bis Regulation, has no jurisdiction to hear and determine the case and does not object to its lack of jurisdiction.

In order to mention all the relevant rules determining the internationally competent courts in the disputes in question with an international element, it should be noted that the application of Article 24(4) of the Brussels I bis Regulation is inappropriate⁵⁴ as the right to a trade name arises informally⁵⁵ through the first public use of a designation in business relations in accordance with the law by its holder, ie without the need to grant a right to the designation by an authority of that country or to register the designation to the public list in that country. The manner of creation of the right to a trade name thus constitutes an exception to the rule of the formal origin of industrial rights to intangible

⁵² See Case C-189/87 *Athanasios Kalfelis v Bankhaus Schröder, Münchmeyer, Hengst and Co and others* ECLI:EU:C:1988:459; Case C-548/12 *Marc Brogitter v Fabrication de Montres Normandes EURL and Karsten Fräßdorf* ECLI:EU:C:2014:148.

⁵³ Magnus and Mankowski (n 33) 184–186; see also Jiří Valdhans, *Právní úprava mimosmluvních závazků s mezinárodním prvkem* (CH Beck 2012) 18–41.

⁵⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that this exclusive jurisdiction applies only to disputes concerning the existence (validity) of intellectual property rights. See Kono (n 33) 38–39.

⁵⁵ Petr Hajn and Ivo Telec, 'Czech Republic' in Paul Lange (ed), *International Trade Mark and Signs Protection, A Handbook* (CH Beck 2010) 281. See also Anton Škreko, 'Priemyselné práva v informačnej a poznatkovo orientovanej spoločnosti' in Ján Švidroň (ed), *Právo duševného vlastníctva v informačnej spoločnosti a v systéme práva* (VEDA 2009) 581; Martin Boháček, 'Obchodní jméno (firemní označení)' in Martin Boháček et al, *Právo průmyslového a jiného duševního vlastníctví* (VŠE 1994) 66, 70.

assets.⁵⁶ Thus, in disputes of infringement of the right to a trade name, the plaintiff is not exposed to the potential 'torpedoing' of his efforts by (i) the objection of the non-existence (invalidity) of the plaintiff's right to a trade name, which would have to be heard in the courts of (always one) state in which the trade name is protected; or (ii) an action being brought for the non-existence of the plaintiff's right to a trade name in the (always one) state in which the trade name is protected.⁵⁷

However, there may be situations where the infringer resides outside the territory of the Member States and there is no valid prorogation agreement in favour of the Member State. In these cases, the court⁵⁸ before which the trader brings an action to answer the question whether it has jurisdiction to settle the dispute applies (other) rules of its private international law – not the Brussels I bis Regulation (Article 6(1)).

In the case of the Czech Republic, this would be Section 6(1) of Act no 91/2012 Coll, Governing Private International Law (GPIL), in connection with Section 6 of Act no 221/2006 Coll, on the Enforcement of Industrial Property Rights and the Protection of Trade Secrets (EIPR) if there is no other rule enjoying priority of application over these national rules, eg in a bilateral or multilateral international agreement (Article 1(2) and Article 10 of the Constitution of the Czech Republic and Section 2 GPIL).

However, if the Czech court qualified the infringement specified in the action as a violation of unfair competition rules and not as an interference with an industrial property right (eg in the case of infringing 'the right to a trade name' of an unregistered trader in the Commercial Register), we would deduce the jurisdiction of the Czech courts pursuant to Section 6(1) GPIL in conjunction with Section 9(2)(h) and Section 84 et seq of Act no 99/1963 Coll, Code of Civil Procedure.

4 The main criterion for determining the applicable law

If we address the issue of determining the law applicable to disputes arising from infringement of the right to a trade name (as an industrial right) from non-contractual obligations in a court of a Member State, we apply the unified EU law settled in the Rome II Regulation.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ One of the other exceptions that applies to the right to a trade name is the specific duration of this right, as the right to a trade name expires when its holder ceases to carry on business under that designation. In terms of time, the right to a trade name is not otherwise limited or conditional (eg by paying maintenance fees). See also Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 109–110.

⁵⁷ For more information, see Králíček (n 48) 211–262; Kono (n 33) 39–42, 100–103.

⁵⁸ In the case of an action brought in Switzerland, Norway, or Iceland, we would use rules basically similar to those which can be found in the Brussels I bis Regulation, due to the Lugano Treaty, because this Treaty corresponds in content to the previous 'version' of the Brussels I bis Regulation.

⁵⁹ On the application test of the Rome II Regulation, see Malacka and Ryšavý (n 15) 149–150; Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 204–205; Rozehnalová et al (n 33) 132–133.

According to Article 8(1) thereof, the law applicable to non-contractual⁶⁰ obligations arising from an infringement of or threat to (Article 2(2) of the Rome II Regulation) an intellectual property right⁶¹ is the law of the country to which the protection of those rights applies, regardless of whether this is a law of a Member State or of a non-Member State (Article 3). Preserving the generally accepted *lex loci protectionis* principle in relation to an infringement of intellectual property rights is also emphasised in Recital 26 of the Rome II Regulation. That is, in a model case (for the purpose of understanding the *lex loci protectionis* principle), where an action for the infringement of a German trader's right to his trade name in Germany is brought in an internationally competent⁶² court in Poland, as the infringer established under California law has a registered branch in Poland (as well as executable assets), will be decided under German law.⁶³

The same rule for determining the applicable law also applies in a situation where the injured party does not bring an action for damages against the infringer, but an action for unjust enrichment, or an action for a breach of pre-contractual liability or agency without mandate, as Article 8 of the Rome II Regulation takes precedence over Articles 10 to 12 of the Rome II Regulation (Article 13). In the event of a dispute over unjust enrichment, the plaintiff may, *inter alia*, use the harmonised EU rules and sue for the issuing of up to twice the licence fee that the infringer would otherwise have to pay to the trade name holder (Article 13(1)(a) and (b) and 13(2) of Directive no 2004/48/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the enforcement of intellectual property rights, the content of which has been implemented in Czech law in Section 5(2) and (3) EIPR).

The applicable law thus determined cannot be avoided even by recourse to the escape clauses contained in Article 4(2) and (3) of the Rome II Regulation, since Article 8 of the Rome II Regulation is a *lex specialis* in the first place.⁶⁴ Similarly, Article 8 takes precedence over the application of Article 6 of the Rome II Regulation, which governs disputes arising

⁶⁰ On the autonomous definition of a non-contractual obligation, see Case C-189/87 *Athanasios Kalfelis v Bankhaus Schröder, Münchmeyer, Hengst and Co and others* ECLI:EU:C:1988:459; Rozehnalová et al (n 33) 134.

⁶¹ On the autonomous interpretation of the concept of intellectual property in the context of the Rome II Regulation, see Recital 26 of the Rome II Regulation; Art 2 point viii) of the Convention Establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization; Art 1(2) of the Paris Convention; Art 1(2) and Art 2(2) of the TRIPS. For more information, see Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 218–226; Kono (n 33) 150. On the binding nature of those international agreements for the EU, see Case C-300/98 *Parfums Christian Dior SA v TUK Consultancy BV and Assco Gerüste GmbH and Rob van Dijk v Wilhelm Layher GmbH & Co KG and Layher BV* ECLI:EU:C:2000:688.

⁶² See above.

⁶³ The author reiterates that it is irrelevant if Polish law treats the right to a trade name as an (absolute) right to industrial property because an autonomous qualification within the framework of the EU law will be applied preferentially (see above).

⁶⁴ Luboš Tichý, *Nařízení č. 864/2007 o právu rozhodném pro mimosmluvní závazkové vztahy (Řím II). Komentář* (CH Beck 2018) 117–119; Stone (n 37) 566.

from infringements of unfair competition rules.⁶⁵

It may also be added that if a plaintiff in a court seeks protection of the right to a trade name with effects in the territory of several states, such claims must be divided according to the territory of the infringing states (considering the territoriality principle which also applies to the right to a trade name), and always to apply another applicable law in relation to such distributed claims. This is a mosaic-like method of protection (also known as the *dépeçage* principle).⁶⁶

The determined law decisive for the claim for damages or unjust enrichment is also decisive for (partial) questions related to this issue, in particular the question of the tortious capacity of the infringer, his possible exculpation, the origin of the damage, the possible claims for compensation, the possible interim measures, the transferability of the right to compensation, limitation, and prescription of the damages, the duration of time limits (Article 15 of the Rome II Regulation) and even for the question of the application of legal presumptions and the determination of the burden of proof between the parties to the dispute (Article 22(1) of the Rome II Regulation). Generally, unless a partial question⁶⁷ is governed separately by a conflict-of-laws rule, the law applicable to the basic question applies to it, since they together form a single factual situation and should therefore be subject to the same applicable law.⁶⁸ The question of the existence or validity of the intellectual property right which has been infringed could thus be subordinated (as a preliminary issue in infringement proceedings) to *lex causae* rules, ie also to the *lex loci protectionis* principle.⁶⁹

However, the Rome II Regulation does not take precedence over international agreements dealing with the law applicable to non-contractual obligations arising from infringements of intellectual property rights concluded before its adoption (ie before 11 July 2007) and if at least one non-Member State is a party to those agreements (Article 28(1) of the Rome II Regulation).⁷⁰ On the other hand, when such an international agreement is concluded exclusively between the Member States, irrespective of the time of the conclusion of that agreement, the rules of the Rome II Regulation apply (Article 28(2) of the Rome II Regulation; Article 351(2) TFEU).

⁶⁵ Tichý (n 64) 100; Claudia Hahn and Olivier Tell, 'The European Commission's Agenda: The Future "Rome I and II" Regulations' in Jürgen Basedow et al (eds), *Intellectual Property in the Conflict of Law* (Mohr Siebeck 2005) 16; Kono (n 33) 152.

⁶⁶ Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 234–235. On the view that the *dépeçage* principle is mainly the result of the inability to agree on a uniform law or a conflict-of-law rule at the political level, see Kessedjian (n 15) 23–25.

⁶⁷ On distinguishing a partial question from a preliminary question in relation to the basic question, see Malacka and Ryšavý (n 15) 49–51.

⁶⁸ Rozehnalová et al (n 33) 130–131.

⁶⁹ Identically, Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 259.

⁷⁰ Tichý (n 64) 244.

In the event of the non-application of the Rome II Regulation or other international treaties, in the conditions of Czech private international law (when the Czech court would have jurisdiction) we would determine the law applicable to the non-contractual obligation arising from the infringement of intellectual property rights pursuant to Section 80 GPIL, which refers us (identically) to the *lex loci protectionis* principle.⁷¹ However, as this Act does not contain a rule similar to Article 22 of the Rome II Regulation (see above), it must be emphasised that the applicable law determined in this way is relevant only to substantive law issues (from the point of view of Czech systematics, ie whether there has been interference with a right, what claims the injured party can assert from this interference, whether these rights can be transferred, when these rights can be limited, etc). Procedural law issues here are fully subject to *lex fori* rules (eg rules of litigation, including the apportionment of the burden of assertion and the burden of proof).⁷² But the situation where we would use Section 80 GPIL to determine the applicable law is quite hypothetical because the Rome II Regulation has been binding on the Czech courts since its entry into force (11 January 2009).

Furthermore, if we are dealing with the issue of applicable law in a court located in a non-Member State, we will apply the local rules of private international law.

When applying the rules of private international law of (any) state, it is also necessary to resolve the issue of remissions and transmissions. In the case of the Rome II Regulation, the remissions and transmissions contained in the rules of private international law are excluded by Article 24. If the law applicable were Czech law and the Rome II Regulation did not apply, Section 21 GPIL would address this situation, which stipulates that neither remission nor transmission is to be taken into account.

Finally, in matters related to the law applicable to the trader's infringement of his right to a trade name, mandatory rules of the legal order of the place of the court may be in play (Article 16 of the Rome II Regulation) as well as public policy rules according to the place of that court (forum). They may, for example, reverse the conclusion reached under the law applicable to the determination of the holder of that right, based on an assessment of the preliminary question: who is the holder of the right to the trade name and what is the transferability of this right (if, for

⁷¹ The scope of application of Sec 80 GPIL is wider than the scope of Art 8 of the Rome II Regulation, since Sec 80 applies not only to non-contractual obligations, but also to contractual obligations related to intellectual property rights. See Malacka and Ryšavý (n 15) 143–144.

⁷² The Supreme Court considers the rules determining burden of proof to be the rules of procedural law. See *ABC Trepka, s r o, v SPS engineering, s r o* ECLI:CZ:NS:2020:32. CDO.1287.2018.1, regardless of whether they interfere with the substantive or procedural law problematics. On this question, see Kristýna Horková, 'Smluvní fikce doručení' (Masaryk University 2020) 44–46 <<https://is.muni.cz/th/slu68/>> accessed 15 May 2022.

example, the licensee seeks the protection of that right)?⁷³

5 Is the choice of applicable law possible?

Along with the question of determining the applicable law, it is appropriate to ask whether it is possible to change (or replace) the law determined in this way by an agreement of the parties in the dispute (choice of law). In the context of the Rome II Regulation, the answer is provided by Article 8(3), which precludes the application of Article 14 providing a choice of law where the law applicable under Article 8 and Articles 10 to 12 of the Rome II Regulation is determined.

However, if we determine the law applicable under the rules of private international law of a particular state or international treaties governing the determination of the law applicable to non-contractual obligations with an international element, the above rule on the exclusion of choice of law may be absent and this path could be in play. However, the answer to this question must be sought in the context of a legally binding act (in the *lex fori* law) determining the law applicable to a particular non-contractual obligation and subsequently also in the context of the applicable law itself.

However, the ban on the choice of law for intellectual property infringement disputes, which applies to all sub-questions of this issue, is criticised in the literature for its insufficient justification (eg in the Commission's proposal for the Rome II Regulation) or with reference to a simple repetition of the phrase that it is necessary to insist on the generally accepted⁷⁴ *lex loci protectionis* principle, sometimes even erroneously identified with the territoriality principle.^{75,76}

6 The *dépeçage* principle and 'use in commerce/in the course of trade'

The mosaic-like method of determining the applicable law in cases of resolving disputes arising from the infringement of a trader's right to a trade name in several countries seems to be inflexible and, in extreme cases, completely dysfunctional. Unfortunately, this is not just a theoretical situation. Many relevant legal systems can be obvious, for example, at times when the exclusive right of a well-known trader to his designation

⁷³ Kessedjian (n 15) 27–28; Axel Metzger, 'Transfer of Rights, License Agreements, and Conflict of Law: Remarks on the Rome Conventions of 1980 and the Current ALI Draft' in Jürgen Basedow et al (eds), *Intellectual Property in the Conflict of Law* (Mohr Siebeck 2005) 66–69, 71–72; See Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 260–262.

⁷⁴ See European Max Planck Group on Conflict of Laws in Intellectual Property (CLIP), *Conflict of Laws in Intellectual Property: The CLIP Principles and Commentary* (OUP 2013) 304–307.

⁷⁵ On the need to distinguish the territoriality principle from the *lex loci protectionis* principle, see Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 127, 131, 143–145, 212–216.

⁷⁶ Kyselovská and Koukal (n 6) 211–212, 247–250; Kono (n 33) 152–153.

(eg an international holding company) is infringed via the Internet.⁷⁷

However, it is important to ask whether or not it is necessary to consider an infringement of the right to a trade name in so many countries (apart from the possible narrowing of the disputed matter by the plaintiff himself by defining his claim in the application). When is the right of a trader to his trade name infringed? When the damage occurs in the legal sphere of the trader concerned.

It follows from the above that it is necessary (among other things) to conclude that the infringement took place 'on the territory of a particular state'.

In 2001, the WIPO published a Joint Recommendation Concerning Provisions on the Protection of Marks, and Other Industrial Property Rights in Signs, on the Internet⁷⁸ – a set of rules of a soft law nature, which states in Article 2 that the use of designations on the Internet represents the use of the designation in the territory of a particular WIPO Contracting State if it has a commercial effect there.

This rule is not revolutionary; it is fully applied, for example, to trademark rights. Trademark law gives its owner the exclusive right to use a particular designation in relation to the goods and services for which it has been registered (if we are not speaking about a well-known trademark or trademark with a reputation in a given state) only to the extent to which this applies to business relations (Section 8(2) to (4) of Act no 441/2003 Coll, on Trademarks; Article 9(2) to (4) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 June 2017 on the European Union Trade Mark); the commercial effect of unlawful use is thus already implicitly assumed here from the substance of the case (the content of the right to a trademark).⁷⁹

The right to a trade name has a similar purpose to the right to a trademark – its aim is to distinguish traders (legal entities) from others in a given (relevant) market – and therefore the scope of trade name protection should be similarly limited as in the case of the right to a trademark, ie only for use in business relations.⁸⁰ Therefore, if a trade name were used in a way that has no commercial effect in the territory of a particular state, we should not consider it interfering with this right at all, and there would be no need to address the related issues (place of jurisdiction and applicable law).

⁷⁷ See Tichý (n 64) 124–125.

⁷⁸ See above (n 42).

⁷⁹ In the long term, the CJEU also stays with this conclusion. See Joined Cases *Google France SARL and Google Inc v Louis Vuitton Malletier SA* (C-236/08), *Google France SARL v Viaticum SA and Luteciel SARL* (C-237/08) and *Google France SARL v Centre national de recherche en relations humaines (CNRRH) SARL and Others* (C238/08) ECLI:EU:C:2010:159, paras 50–58.

⁸⁰ See Annette Kur, 'Trademark Conflicts on the Internet: Territoriality Redefined?' in Jürgen Basedow et al (eds), *Intellectual Property in the Conflict of Law* (Mohr Siebeck 2005) 185–187.

However, the transposition of this principle into applicable law rests on the shoulders of individual states (not only the EU). They must accept this approach as their own and, if necessary, change their existing legislation or its interpretation, if its wording allows for it.

Prima facie, complicated modification of the mosaic-like method of determining the law applicable in cases of infringement of the right to a trade name on the Internet is functionally narrowed in the light of the aforementioned rule, apart from the subsequent problem that arose with this change (namely the differences in the interpretation of the term *use in commerce* or *in the course of trade*⁸¹ in the context of the substantive rules of national legal systems).⁸²

7 Conclusions

In the case of an internationally competent court being designated for a non-contractual infringement of the right to a trade name as an industrial property right according to the criteria contained in the Brussels I bis Regulation and CJEU case law, it can be concluded that an injured trader can sue the infringer of his right to a trade name (apart from the establishment of international jurisdiction on the basis of prorogation and tacit prorogation) in the state:

[1] where the *infringer resides*. To determine the domicile of the infringer as a natural person, the court uses the law of the state in which the person is domiciled, and in the case of the infringer as a legal person, he can be sued in the state in which he has his statutory seat, central administration, or principal place of business.

[2] where the harmful event occurred or may occur, which covers both the *delicti commissi* place and *damni infecti* places. The court which would have jurisdiction based on the *delicti commissi* place could then rule on the trader's claim for damages incurred in the territory of several countries (the damage in its entirety), while the court which would be determined as internationally competent according to the *damni infecti* place could decide (only) on the claim for damages incurred in the territory of this state.

[3] where the plaintiff (injured party) has a *centre of interests* (main economic activity). The court thus determined may then decide on the damage in its entirety.

It follows that it is advantageous for the injured trader to choose the internationally competent court ideally in the country according to the *delicti commissi* place or the *centre of interest*.

The law applicable to non-contractual infringements of the right to a trade name being an industrial property right (and related matters) is

⁸¹ See Case C-245/02 *Anheuser-Busch Inc. v Budějovický Budvar, národní podnik* ECLI:EU:C:2004:717, para 73.

⁸² For more information, see Kur (n 80) 177–179, 182.

then, under the Rome II Regulation, the law of the country for which the protection is sought (the *lex loci protectionis* principle). The applicable law thus determined cannot be avoided either by using the escape clauses or by applying rules to disputes arising from the infringement of unfair competition rules. The choice of applicable law cannot be used in these disputes either, which is often criticised by jurisprudence.

Infringing the right to a trade name by acting with consequences within the territory of several countries is also associated with the mosaic-like method of determining the applicable law (the *dépeçage* principle), which means that several laws of the countries involved are decisive for claims, depending on the territories in which the injured party seeks protection of his right. But if we take into account only the laws of the states in which the illegal act (the infringement) has commercial effect, the problem of pluralism of many state orders will be functionally restricted.



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THE RISKS TO JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE IN LATVIA: A VIEW EIGHTEEN YEARS SINCE EU ACCESSION

Beatrice Monciunskaitė*

Abstract: The European Union (EU) is in the midst of what could be deemed the biggest threat to its current order since its inception: Member States backsliding on EU founding values. Indeed, the EU is showing no sign of having the rule of law backsliding crisis under control in states such as Hungary and Poland, a decade since the first signs of populist takeovers emerged. Since the foundational values of liberal constitutional democracy were first challenged in these two Central Eastern European (CEE) countries, similar issues in other Member States have also come to light, such as in the Czech Republic and Malta, amongst others. However, little information is available about the democratic stability of other States that also acceded to the EU in 2004. This paper is a stocktaking exercise which aims to address this gap in relation to the fidelity of Latvia to the founding EU value of the rule of law 18 years since it became an EU member. It will examine the state of judicial independence in Latvia during the past few years. Attacks on judicial independence are the main battleground on which the EU is fighting Hungary and Poland, and a value that is considered central to the EU's understanding of the rule of law. It is important to understand Latvia's current state of judicial independence in order to build a broader picture of the status of the rule of law in all Member States. This knowledge will help to fight the EU's rule of law crisis and the rise of populism. This is something that needs to be achieved sooner rather than later so that the EU can stand united against an ever more aggressive Russia to the East.

Keywords: Latvia, European Union, democracy, rule of law, backsliding, judicial independence.

1 Introduction

This paper will evaluate the state of judicial independence in Latvia, nearly two decades after it acceded to the EU and fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria of stable democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for minorities.¹ Understanding how the rule of law in

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¹ Presidency Conclusions, Copenhagen European Council (21–22 June 1993) 7 A iii.

Latvia has been developing since accession is important at a time of great crisis in the EU. Rule of law backsliding has been a major issue within the EU since the early 2010s – most notably regarding Poland and Hungary, although other Member States have been regressing and facing their own battles too. With the foundational values of the EU being challenged from within, and the war in Ukraine threatening to spread to the Union, understanding every Member State's loyalty to the founding values is imperative. To this end, this paper examines the status of judicial independence in Latvia through the lens of recent developments around structural and institutional issues that threaten the independence of courts, namely, personal attacks on the Chairman of the Judicial Council by the Minister of Justice, the recent dialogue amongst some parliamentarians about the abolition of the Constitutional Court and the resulting delays in the replacement of a Constitutional Court judge. This paper argues that interference from the Latvian legislature and government in judicial matters is weakening judicial independence. These systematic attacks on judicial independence correlate with a rise in populist rhetoric in the Saeima (Latvian parliament) after the continuing success of populist parties in elections during the past decade. Although Latvia has had coalition governments which are not ideologically united, anti-establishment politics have played a significant role and have permeated Latvian governance, damaging judicial independence in recent years. The latest parliamentary elections of October 2022 have resulted in another victory for the incumbent New Unity (Jaunā Vienotība, JV) party, with Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš receiving the go-ahead from President Levits to form a government coalition.² This coalition is likely to include once again the far-right National Alliance (NA) party.³ The 2022 parliamentary election also produced major losses for the dominant Russophone-representing party, Harmony Social Democracy (Saskaņa, SSD), which led to the rise of a new and more radical party being supported by sections of the Russian speaking minority in Latvia, Stability (Stabilitāte, S).⁴ Stability has taken a radical stance against Latvia's support for Ukraine during its invasion, as well as criticising Latvia's mandatory Covid-19 vaccination campaign.⁵ It is evident that populist politics still remain central in Latvia, as per previous elections.

This paper is organised as follows: section two will explain the relevant parts of the Latvian court structure, highlighting some adminis-

² Jānis Kincis, 'Levits Officially Invites Kariņš to Form the Government' (*LSM.LV*, 22 November 2022) <https://www-lsm-lv.translate.goog/raksts/zinas/latvija/levits-oficiali-aicina-karinu-veidot-valdibu.a483584/?utm_source=lsm&utm_medium=theme&utm_campaign=theme&x_tr_sl=lv&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=sc> accessed 29 November 2022.

³ Daunis Auers, 'Continuity and Change after Latvia's 2022 Parliamentary Election' (*London School of Economics*, 25 October 2022) <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2022/10/25/continuity-and-change-after-latvias-2022-parliamentary-election/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

trative issues which constrains the financial freedom of Latvian courts. Third, this paper will describe the personal attacks on the Chairman of the Judicial Council by the Minister of Justice which occurred in early 2021. In section four, the legislature's backlash against the same sex partnership judgment issued by the Constitutional Court in late 2020 will be evaluated. Section five will highlight the dispute which broke out between the Constitutional Court and the legislature regarding the merger of the Varakļāni and Rēzekne self-governing regions. Section six explains how the government's and the legislature's disapproval of the Constitutional Court's reasoning led to the unacceptable politicisation of Constitutional Court appointments, which disrupted the work of that court. Section seven will analyse the EU Commission's response to the judicial independence issues highlighted in this paper, noting the lack of efficacy of the Annual Rule of Law Reports on Latvia. The article will conclude by reiterating that anti-establishment populist parties are a danger to judicial independence and the rule of law as made evident by the fact that populist politics have been behind much of the worrying developments around judicial independence in Latvia that are highlighted in this paper. Such developments should be closely monitored and researched as political movements like those in Latvia are similar to what has happened in Poland and Hungary which means that there is also the very real danger of a populist power grab in Latvia.

2 Latvia's judicial and court administration structure

Latvia's court system and judiciary have come under pressure from the executive in recent years. The excessive supervisory capacity of the Court Administration over judicial budgets and the excessive influence of the Minister of Justice in the day-to-day functioning of courts are causes for concern. Latvian judges have themselves admitted they believe their work is under excessive political pressure at the hands of the Minister of Justice.⁶ The Latvian court system is divided into three tiers. The courts of first instance are nine district courts which hear civil and criminal cases, and one district administrative court.⁷ As of 31 March 2021, there is a new specialised district court, the Court of Economic Cases, which was set up to manage the large amount of financial crimes in Latvia.⁸ New judges of this court are specially trained in matters of money laundering, commercial law, competition law, financial law, and insurance matters.⁹ There was disagreement about the need to establish this specialised court as the Judicial Council feared the new court's scope and jurisdic-

⁶ Linda Spundiņa, 'Latvian Judges Feel Political Pressure from Justice Ministry, Study Shows' (*LSM.LV*, 5 November 2021) <<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/diplomacy/latvian-judges-feel-political-pressure-from-justice-ministry-study-shows.a403936/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁷ Commission, 'Commission staff working document – 2021 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Latvia' SWD (2021) 719 final 2.

⁸ *ibid* 5.

⁹ *ibid*.

tion would be too wide and its implementation superfluous. It was argued that a similar objective could be reached through the existing court structure.¹⁰ At the second tier there are five regional courts which hear civil and commercial cases and one regional administrative court.¹¹ The Supreme Court, at third instance, hears criminal, civil and administrative cases.¹² The Constitutional Court is separate from the court hierarchy and carries out constitutional review.¹³ The Judicial Council is a collegial authority which is charged with the development and improvement of policies and strategies for the judicial system.¹⁴ The Judicial Council is also responsible for nominating candidate judges, selecting and dismissing court presidents, overseeing the judicial map and approving the content of judicial training.¹⁵ The Judicial Council nominates prospective judges through an open competition. Candidate judges are ranked and placed on a list, from which the Minister of Justice suggests a suitable candidate to the Saeima for consideration.¹⁶ Article 83 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia states that 'Judges shall be independent and subject only to the law'.¹⁷ The Constitutional Court has reaffirmed that judges should have financial independence and that judicial power is free from the influence of the political branches of State.¹⁸ Article 85 of the Constitution further strengthens the independence of the Constitutional Court as it is separate from the ordinary court structure.¹⁹ As Constitutional Court justices are appointed for ten-year terms and by a qualified vote of the Saeima, their democratic legitimacy is further reinforced. Therefore, the principle of judicial independence is well elaborated in Latvian constitutional jurisprudence.

¹⁰ Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia, 'The Judicial Council Does Not Support the Draft Resolution of the Minister of Justice' (26 April 2021) <<https://at.gov.lv/en/jaunumi/par-tieslietu-padomi/the-judicial-council-does-not-support-the-draft-resolution-of-the-minister-of-justice-10590?year=2021&month=04>> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹¹ 2021 Rule of Law Report on Latvia (n 7) 2.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Marko Aavik and others, 'Evaluation of the Latvian Judicial System' (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice 2018) CEPEJ-COOP(2018)1 33.

¹⁴ Law on Judicial Power (Article 89(1) of 1993). 01/01/1993 Reporter of the Supreme Council and Government of the Republic of Latvia <<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/62847-on-judicial-power>> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹⁵ 2021 Rule of Law Report on Latvia (n 7) 2.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, Article 83.

¹⁸ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia 18 January 2010 in case no 2009-11-01 2009 Latvia Journal, para 8.2, Press release <<https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/press-release/judgment-in-the-case-on-the-cut-of-judges-remuneration-and-the-minimum-amount-of-their-wage-has-been-announced/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹⁹ Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, Article 85; Ineta Ziemele, Alla Spale and Laila Jurcēna, 'The Constitutional Court of The Republic of Latvia' in Armin von Bogdandy, Alla Peter Huber and Christoph Grabenwarter (eds), *The Max Planck Handbooks in European Public Law* (OUP 2020) 525.

The Court Administration is an institution established in the Law on Judicial Power and is tasked with handling all administrative duties related to the district courts, regional courts, and the land registries office.²⁰ The Supreme Court is in charge of its own administrative duties.²¹ The Court Administration was established in 2004 with the aim of centralising the administrative duties of Latvian courts.²² Originally, this institution was intended to be run under the authority of the Judicial Council, but this was not accepted by policy makers.²³ Therefore, a 2018 report of Latvian judicial independence issued by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice noted that although the Court Administration was created as an independent body, its true independence is difficult to ascertain for various reasons.²⁴ Notably, the Court Administration is directly subordinate to the Minister of Justice and is controlled by a director who is appointed by the Minister of Justice for a term of five years and can be reappointed without limitation.²⁵ Furthermore, the Court Administration has vast scope in court budgetary matters. The Court Administration prepares the budget for both district and regional courts and the land registry office. This draft is sent to the Minister of Justice who asks the Judicial Council for an opinion before the Minister of Finance presents the courts' budget to the Saeima for implementation.²⁶ Importantly, if the Judicial Council disagrees with the draft budget, the Minister of Justice can ignore this and proceed with presenting the budget to the Minister of Finance.²⁷

It is not unusual for court administration to be professionalised and centralised in a single body.²⁸ It might also be efficient to have administrative tasks centralised as the presidents of individual courts could then spend most of their time on judicial duties.²⁹ However, there are concerns within the current Latvian system that are impossible to ignore. As the Court Administration has vast control over the day-to-day running of courts, it is always a concern that judicial behaviours might be directly or indirectly impacted by the knowledge that the Minister of Justice ultimately oversees the essential functions of courts such as budget

²⁰ Law on Judicial Power, 1 January 1993, Reporter of the Supreme Council and Government of the Republic of Latvia <<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/62847-on-judicial-power>> accessed 29 November 2022; Aavik and others (n 13) 11.

²¹ Aavik and others (n 13) 11.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid* 11–12.

²⁴ *ibid* 11.

²⁵ Law on State Civil Service Law (Article 11 of 2000) 22/09/2000, Latvian Journal No 331/333 <<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/10944>> accessed 29 November 2022; Aavik and others (n 13) 12.

²⁶ Law on Judicial Power (Article 50.2(3) of 1993).

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Aavik and others (n 13) 14.

²⁹ *ibid.*

allocation.³⁰ The Judicial Council would be a more appropriate authority to run the Court Administration as this is the only body that largely includes legal professionals and lawyers whose goal is to implement the best practice of the profession.³¹ Nevertheless, the control of the Court Administration by the Minister of Justice constantly runs the risk of the government exerting influence over the judiciary for political gain or entrenchment of power.

The 2018 report of Latvian judicial independence issued by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice also draws attention to the concerns surrounding the appointment of the director of the Court Administration.³² If the government wishes to entrench its power and influence over the judiciary, the appointment of a favourable director of the Court Administration would be particularly beneficial to their agenda. Furthermore, the fact that the director is appointed for a term of five years and the term can be renewed indefinitely indicates that a director sympathetic to the government's or the Minister of Justice's agenda is likely to be re-elected and continue to exert significant control over the judiciary's essential services.³³ Therefore, the directors' actions can be heavily influenced by the knowledge that their reappointment depends on the Minister of Justice approving their work and policies so far.

There are also solid grounds for concerns for Latvia's judicial independence. A 2021 survey of judicial independence carried out by the University of Latvia on behalf of the Judicial Council unveiled that 70.7 per cent of the surveyed judges feel they are under political pressure from the Minister of Justice.³⁴ Furthermore, 25.4 per cent of the judges believe that judicial independence is negatively impacted by the government, while 23.3 per cent said judicial independence is also negatively affected by the Saeima.³⁵ Judges expressed concern over the pressure exerted by the Minister of Justice, political parties, and also the quality of other work of law enforcement bodies which affects judicial work as well.³⁶ The Chairman of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, called for a reform of the judicial system to improve judicial independence and reduce the systemic dependence of courts on the executive.³⁷ In particular, he said that political pressure from the Minister of Justice is felt in budgetary and training matters, which corroborates the concerns of the 2018 report of Latvian

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Spundiņa (n 6).

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ 'Study: Majority of Judges in Latvia Unhappy with Ministry of Justice Interference' (*Baltic News Network*, 5 October 2021) <<https://bnn-news.com/study-majority-of-judges-in-latvia-unhappy-with-ministry-of-justice-interference-224672>> accessed 29 November 2022.

³⁷ *ibid.*

judicial independence issued by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice.³⁸ The Chairman stated that the judicial system needs to be distanced from the executive, for example where courts' budgetary issues should be handled directly with the Minister of Finance instead of needing to go through the Minister of Justice first.³⁹ The Chairman also attributes the judiciary's negative opinion of the Minister of Justice to his numerous baseless and public criticisms of judicial decisions.⁴⁰

3 Latvia's judicial council under pressure from the Minister of Justice

In early 2021, a public dispute broke out between the Minister of Justice, Jānis Bordāns, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Latvia and Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs.⁴¹ Minister Bordāns issued a resolution on the Ministry of Justice website accusing Chairman Strupišs of violating judicial ethics by criticising the judgment of the Riga Regional Court on the high profile case of Aivars Lembergs.⁴² The resolution has since been removed from the Ministry's website after Minister Bordāns' attacks were deemed by the Judicial Ethics Committee to be baseless.⁴³ Minister Bordāns attempted to turn the Judicial Council against their Chairman in a vote as he claimed that Chairman Strupišs was damaging the reputation of the judiciary and preventing foreign investments by commenting on a court's decision to the media.⁴⁴ However, the Judicial Ethics Committee disagreed with the Minister's evaluations and found that Chairman Strupišs was acting within his competence when he spoke to the media about his belief that the Lembergs trial was too lengthy and that many lessons should be drawn from this trial for the Latvian justice system.⁴⁵ Former Minister of Justice, Guntars Grīnvalds, condemned the attacks of Minister Bordāns on the Chairman of the Judicial Council as the worst possible attack on judicial independence.⁴⁶ It is now clear that the Minister of Justice was attempting to censor the polit-

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Spundīņa (n 6).

⁴⁰ 'Study: Majority of Judges in Latvia Unhappy with Ministry of Justice Interference' (n 36).

⁴¹ Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia (n 10).

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Uldis Dreiblat and Ritums Rozenbergs, 'Former Minister of Justice Guntars Grīnvalds: Bordāns Is Trying to Influence Court Decisions' *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* (12 March 2021) <https://neatkariga-nra-lv.translate.googleusercontent.com/341724-bijusais-tieslietu-ministrs-guntars-grinvalds-bordans-megina-ietekmet-tiesu-lemumus?_x_tr_sl=lv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-GB&_x_tr_pto=nui,elem> accessed 2 December 2022.

⁴⁵ 'Strupišs: The Length of the Lembergs Case Is an Example for Judges of How Not to Do It' (LSM.LV, 26 February 2021) <https://www-lsm-lv.translate.googleusercontent.com/raksts/zinas/latvija/strupiss-lemberga-lietas-ilgums--piemers-tiesnesiem-ka-nevajag-darit.a394493/?_x_tr_sl=lv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=nui,sc> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁴⁶ Dreiblat and Rozenbergs (n 44).

ically inconvenient opinions of Chairman Strupiņš which threatened the Minister's reputation and competence. It has also been reported that the Minister's public criticism of Chairman Strupiņš indicated that Minister Bordāns had attempted to gain control of, and politicise, a new judicial training institution which is currently being developed.⁴⁷

4 The legislature's backlash against the same-sex partnership judgement

The Latvian Constitutional Court has faced attacks from members of the executive and legislature in recent years. On 12 November 2020, the Latvian Constitutional Court delivered a landmark judgment which affirmed the rights of same-sex parents and demanded legal protection for same-sex couples.⁴⁸ The Court ruled that Section 155, paragraph 1 of the Labour Law which allows for 10 days paternity leave for a father (man) after the birth of his child was incompatible with Article 110 of the Latvian Constitution which provides that the state is required to protect the family.⁴⁹ The applicant, a woman in a same-sex relationship with the child's mother, claimed that the Labour Law's specification that only fathers are entitled to ten days leave was discriminatory towards her same-sex relationship and incompatible with the state's requirement to protect her family as required by Article 110 of the Constitution.⁵⁰

The Constitutional Court ruled that the State has a positive obligation to protect all families, not just those established by traditional means such as marriage, a biological relationship, or a legally recognised child-parent relationship. A family is a social institution based on social reality and identifiable close personal ties based on understanding and respect.⁵¹ Therefore, the Court acknowledges that in social reality close personal ties can also emerge as a result of actual cohabitation.⁵² The first sentence of Article 110 of the Constitution sets out the State's positive obligation to protect and support every family, including also a de facto family which the Constitutional Court had previously established in its judgment of 5 December 2019.⁵³ The Court also reasoned that Latvia is an independent, democratic state that respects the rule of law and

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia 12 November 2020 in case no 2019-33-01 2020 Latvia Journal <[https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search\[number\]=2019-33-01](https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search[number]=2019-33-01)> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁴⁹ *ibid* 36.

⁵⁰ *ibid* 2.

⁵¹ *ibid* 12.1.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia 5 December 2019 in case no 2019-01-01 2019 Latvia Journal <[https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search\[number\]=2019-01-01](https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search[number]=2019-01-01)> accessed 29 November 2022, para 12.2.2.

which strongly values human dignity.⁵⁴ The principle of human dignity does not allow the State to waive the fundamental rights of a particular person, or group of persons.⁵⁵ Stereotypes existing in society cannot serve as justification to diminish the fundamental rights of a specific person or group of persons in a democratic State governed by the rule of law.⁵⁶

While the LGBTQ+ community and their supporters celebrated this judgment and the Constitutional Court's initiative in protecting the rights of same-sex couples, the judgment was seen by many in society and parliament as an attack on traditional family and Catholic values.⁵⁷ The judgment sent shockwaves through Latvian politics with many members of government and parliament not only criticising the judgment on its merits but also the Constitutional Court's authority and independence.⁵⁸

Many members of the Saeima from a diverse group of parties and backgrounds voiced problematic opinions about the Constitutional Court and even called for its abolition.⁵⁹ Juris Rancāns from the New Conservative party (*Jaunā konservatīvā partija*, JKP), proclaiming that 'unfortunately, there is currently a myth in the public sphere about the Constitutional Court as an institution endowed with divine legitimacy, which stands above the political will of the people or the political will of the legislator, but in reality this is not the case'.⁶⁰ Aleksandrs Kiršteins (NA) called the Constitutional Court a 'decorative and expensive' institution which does not need to exist and its competence could be transferred to the Supreme Court.⁶¹ In sum, the general consensus was that the Constitutional Court had become overly politicised and had overstepped its competence. Some members of parliament declared that the Court has no legitimate standing as it was not included in the original 1922 Sat-

⁵⁴ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia in case no 2019-33-01 (n 48) para 12.2.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Kalvis Engīzers and Madara Melņika, 'Defining the Modern Family: The Latvian Constitutional Court, the Definition of "Family", and Parliamentary Bitterness' (*Verfassungsblog*, 2 February 2021) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/defining-the-modern-family/>> accessed 29 November 2022; 'Supporters of 'traditional' Families Gather by Latvian Constitutional Court' (*LSM.LV*, 9 December 2020) <<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/supporters-of-traditional-families-gather-by-latvian-constitutional-court.a384696/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁵⁸ Jānis Lasmanis, 'Deputies Question the Competence of the Constitutional Court. A New Judge Shall Not Be Elected' (*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 22 December 2020) <https://neatkariga-nra-lv.translate.google.com/politika/334033-deputati-apsauba-satversmes-tiesas-kompetenci-jaunu-tiesnesi-neievele?_x_tr_sl=lv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-GB&_x_tr_pto=nui,elem> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*; Sanita Upleja, 'The Saeima Confirms Anita Rodiņš as a Judge of the Constitutional Court' (*Defli*, 3 November 2021) <https://www.delfi-lv.translate.google.com/news/national/politics/saeima-apstiprina-anitu-rodinu-satversmes-tiesas-tiesnesa-ama-ta.d?id=53012637&_x_tr_sl=lv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-GB&_x_tr_pto=nui,elem> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁶⁰ Lasmanis (n 58).

⁶¹ *ibid.*

versme.⁶² This alludes to the fact that the Latvian Constitutional Court was established in 1996, five years after the reestablishment of Latvian independence.⁶³ Therefore, the parliamentarians reasoned that the Court lacks legitimacy and is dispensable, as many neighbouring countries like Estonia, Sweden and Finland do not have a Constitutional Court.⁶⁴ Of course, this ignores the fact that the Supreme Court in those countries is also permitted to perform judicial review.

All of this culminated in a party of the governing coalition, NA, submitting a proposal to amend Article 110 of the Latvian Constitution on 7 November 2021.⁶⁵ The new text would have stated that a family can only be formed by marriage, blood kinship and adoption and must be based on a union between a man and a woman.⁶⁶ Although Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš stated that this was not the appropriate time to amend the Satversme (alluding to the emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic), on 14 January 2021, 47 members of parliament voted in favour of the amendment being put to Saeima committees for further deliberation.⁶⁷ However, this proposed amendment was abandoned in due course. Later, a referendum was proposed by conservative members of parliament to introduce a new definition of family which would strengthen the position of traditional family values. However, again, the initiative did not gather enough votes from the public for the question to be put to the people in a referendum.⁶⁸ In early 2022, the Minister of Justice initiated a draft civil partnership bill which would allow for the legal recognition of same-sex couples so that the requirements set out by the Constitutional Court in the same-sex partnership judgment would be satisfied. However, despite the bill passing through to the third reading in the Saeima, it failed due to conservative members of parliament such as NA, Farmers and Greens

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Kristīne Krūma and Sandijs Statkus, 'The Constitution of Latvia: A Bridge Between Traditions and Modernity' in Anneli Albi and Samo Bardutzky (eds), *National Constitutions in European and Global Governance: Democracy, Rights, the Rule of Law* (TMC Asser Press 2019) 951–952.

⁶⁴ Lasmanis (n 58).

⁶⁵ Draft Amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 7 January 2021, no 3396.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ 'Kariņš: This Is Not the Time for Discussions on Amendments to the Satversme' (*Apollo.lv*, 11 January 2021) <https://www-apollo-lv.translate.googleusercontent.com/translate/a/7153128/karins-sis-nav-istais-laiks-diskusijam-par-grozijumiem-satversme?_x_tr_sl=lv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-GB&_x_tr_pto=nui,elem> accessed 29 November 2022; Jānis Kincis, 'Saeima Debates Definition of "Family" in the Constitution' (*LSM.LV*, 14 January 2021) <<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/saeima/saeima-debates-definition-of-family-in-the-constitution.a388754/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁶⁸ 'Another Initiative Launched to Define "Family" in the Constitution of Latvia' (*LSM.LV*, 3 August 2022) <<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/another-initiative-launched-to-define-family-in-constitution-of-latvia.a467810/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

(Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība, ZZS), and Harmony boycotting the vote.⁶⁹ Thus, the Saeima has now passed the deadline set by the Constitutional Court by which it should have given legal recognition to same-sex couples. This presents a major concern for the standing of the Constitutional Court as it diminishes the perceived authority of the judiciary's decisions in the public eye. Furthermore, a constitutional court unable to carry out constitutional review is stripped of its purpose and is incompatible with the requirement of judicial independence demanded by liberal constitutional democracy.

5 Backlash against the Constitutional Court regarding the merger of the Varakļāni and Rēzekne self-governing regions

Another face-off between the legislature and the Constitutional Court came just a few months later in May 2021 after the Constitutional Court delivered its judgment on the merger of the Varakļāni and Rēzekne self-governing regions, threatening to start a constitutional crisis.⁷⁰ The merger of the two regions came about as a result of the adoption of a new law on 'Administrative Territories and Settlements' in June 2020 by the Saeima.⁷¹ This law initiated the reform of Latvia's local government regions to tackle ongoing national concerns over declining demographics in rural Latvia and the related issue of these smaller rural regions being unable to cope financially with necessary public administration.⁷² The reforms would redraw regional boundaries and merge some smaller self-governing regions with bigger ones to improve the overall delivery of public administration and, in turn, save the Latvian economy millions of euro by making the system more efficient.⁷³ However, this reform proved to be one of the most contentious political issues in recent years. Many wealthier self-governing regions were opposed to the reforms as their merger with poorer regions sparked concerns over the dilution of the quality of public services.⁷⁴ Another major concern was the planned creation of fewer but larger administrative units which would absorb the administrative tasks previously performed by public sector workers in smaller self-governing regions.⁷⁵ This would create job losses and mean that larger towns would attract more resources, devastating already faltering rural communi-

⁶⁹ 'Latvian Saeima Dodges Civil Union Law Adoption Again' (*LSM.LV*, 2 June 2022) <<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/latvian-saeima-dodges-civil-union-law-adoption-again.a459661/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁷⁰ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia, 28 May 2021 in case no 2020-43-0106, 2021, *Latvia Journal* <[https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search\[number\]=2019-33-01](https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search[number]=2019-33-01)> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁷¹ Law on Administrative Territories and Settlements (2020). 10/06/2020 *Latvian Journal*. No 119C.1 1.

⁷² Daunis Auers, 'Continuity in Change? Latvia's Local Governments after Regional Reform and Local Government Elections' (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2021) 4.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid* 4–5.

ties.⁷⁶ Of course, individual politicians were also concerned about losing political influence over certain self-governing regions during the reshuffle which further aggravated the discourse around the reform.⁷⁷ Auers notes that a 'window of opportunity' emerged when the current governing coalition formed in January 2019, led by Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš (JV).⁷⁸ The coalition consists of five parties, all with differing ideologies, but crucially the ZZS, which held the prime minister position before the 2018 general election, was left in opposition.⁷⁹ This regional reform would have been very difficult if the ZZS were in power as they have been fierce advocates of small rural towns and villages.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, even in opposition, Viktors Valainis, a ZZS politician and member of the Saeima, submitted hundreds of amendments to the proposed law during parliamentary debates.⁸¹ Scrutiny also came from the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Authorities as they lodged a complaint with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe which resulted in a critical report being issued by the Congress.⁸² The report published in late 2020 reasoned that the new reforms were evidence of 'deterioration in the overall situation of local democracy' and lacked proper consultation with local authorities and greatly reduced the financial autonomy of local authorities in Latvia.⁸³ A follow-up report by the Congress published after the adoption of the reforms by the Saeima lamented that the reform process was a 'missed opportunity for Latvia to adopt a territorial reform in full compliance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government which it has ratified'.⁸⁴

On 28 May, Latvia's Constitutional Court ruled against the merger of Varakļāni with Rēzekne less than ten days before planned municipal elections.⁸⁵ The Court reasoned that the Saeima, which had merged the two self-governing regions on the third and final reading of the law, had ignored some crucial objectives of the reform.⁸⁶ Mergers should be based on efficiency rather than cultural history, and it further stated that the opinion of the counties' residents should be considered, which was relevant because 84% of Varakļāni residents preferred to be merged with

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.* 4.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* 3–4.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.* 4.

⁸² 'Recommendation 447 (2020) Fact-Finding Report on Territorial Reform in Latvia, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe' 2.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, *Communication by the Secretary General of the Congress at the 1397th Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies* (CG(2021)40-14, Council of Europe, 2021) 24.

⁸⁵ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia in case no 2020-43-0106.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* 3.1.

Madona according to a poll.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Rēzekne County did not have the status or capacity to merge with Varakļāni County.⁸⁸ The last minute cancellation of the merger prompted the Central Election Committee to cancel the planned municipal elections in both Rēzekne and Madona counties as the Constitutional Court had suggested that Madona was a better choice than Rēzekne.⁸⁹

The Constitutional Court's judgement sparked opposition from some Saeima factions, including the governing NA and JKP.⁹⁰ The Saeima threatened to ignore the judgment and to push on with a vote to merge Varakļāni with Rēzekne through another parliamentary vote, once again bringing the Constitutional Court's reputation and authority into question.⁹¹ As Latvia sat on the verge of spiralling into a constitutional crisis, President Levits was forced to mediate and urged the Saeima to respect the decision of the Court and called upon representatives of the parties in coalition to meet and resolve the issue.⁹² A temporary solution was decided which saw the Saeima vote to keep Varakļāni as a separate county.⁹³ However, as this county has a small population of 3,000 and does not have the capacity to support itself, the decision will need to be revisited at a later stage.⁹⁴

President Levits was forced to remind the Saeima that 'Latvia is a country which adheres to the rule of law and that means that the Saeima must respect the decisions of the Constitutional Court. If the Saeima ignores the Court's rulings, it creates the risk of a constitutional crisis'.⁹⁵ Indeed, the legislature disrespecting the authority and decision of the Constitutional Court is a blatant attack on the rule of law.⁹⁶ Although a pause has been placed on the dispute over the merger of self-governing regions which avoided an outright coup against the Constitutional Court, this was the second major attack on the Constitutional Court's authority

⁸⁷ *ibid*; Auers (n 72) 5.

⁸⁸ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia in case no 2020-43-0106 para 3.1.

⁸⁹ *ibid*; Auers (n 72) 5.

⁹⁰ *ibid*.

⁹¹ Office of the President, 'President of Latvia Expects Varakļāni Region Status Issue to Be Resolved According to Satversme' (*President of the Republic of Latvia*, 6 January 2021) <<https://www.president.lv/en/article/president-latvia-expects-varaklani-region-status-issue-be-resolved-according-satversme>> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁹² Office of the President (n 91).

⁹³ 'Transcript of the Saeima, 1 June 2021. No 190/LP13, 14 June 2021, Latvian Journal No 113'.

⁹⁴ Auers (n 72) 5.

⁹⁵ Office of the President (n 91).

⁹⁶ Guntars Laganovskis, 'Ignoring the Judgment of the Constitutional Court Would Actually Change the Meaning of the State' (*LV Portal*, 2 June 2021) <https://lvportals-lv.translate.google.com/translate/g/norises/328922-satversmes-tiesas-sprieduma-ignoresana-faktiski-mainitu-valsts-jegu-2021?_x_tr_sl=lv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=nui,sc,elem> accessed 29 November 2022.

and legitimacy waged by the legislature and executive within months. These attacks have severe consequences on the Constitutional Court's reputation which is particularly pertinent given that Latvia's citizens are already weary and untrusting of their justice system.

6 Politicisation of the Constitutional Court appointments procedure

Late 2020 and early 2021 saw another crisis between the Constitutional Court and the Saeima. The President of the Constitutional Court, Ineta Ziemele, left her position on 2 October 2020 as she was appointed as a judge of the Court of Justice of the European Union.⁹⁷ This created a vacancy in the Constitutional Court that the Saeima struggled to fill due to their fears that the Constitutional Court had become too politically active. According to Article 4 and 12 of the Constitutional Court Law, Constitutional Court judges are confirmed by the Saeima.⁹⁸ Three Constitutional Court judges are confirmed following a proposal by not fewer than ten members of the Saeima, two following a proposal by the Cabinet of Ministers, and two more following a proposal by the Supreme Court plenary session.⁹⁹ The Supreme Court plenary session selects candidates for the position of a Constitutional Court judge from among the judges of the Republic of Latvia.¹⁰⁰ However, the appointment of a new judge proved to be particularly difficult for the Saeima as the political backlash against the Constitutional Court's judgment on same-sex couples in early November was still a contentious issue.¹⁰¹ Five candidates were nominated by different Saeima factions before the end of 2020 but none of the five nominees managed to acquire the necessary 51 votes in a parliamentary sitting on 21 December 2020.¹⁰² The main reason for the indecision revolved around the ongoing narrative of the Saeima that questioned the very necessity of the Constitutional Court as an institution.¹⁰³ This was especially the case after the same-sex couples' decision which many viewed as evidence that the Constitutional Court had over-

⁹⁷ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia, 'President of the Constitutional Court Ineta Ziemele Will Commence Performing the Duties of the Judge of CJEU on 6 October' <<https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/press-release/president-of-the-constitutional-court-ineta-ziemele-will-commence-performing-the-duties-of-the-judge-of-cjeu-on-6-october/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

⁹⁸ Law of the Constitutional Court (1996, Section 4(1)), 14 June 1996, Latvian Journal, no 103.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Upleja (n 59).

¹⁰² Kārlis Arājs, 'The Saeima Will Not Elect a New Judge of the Constitutional Court: Another Election Will Have to Be Held' (*Delfi*, 21 December 2020) <https://www.delfi-lv.translate.google.com/news/national/politics/saeima-jaunu-satversmes-tiesas-tiesnesi-neizvel-bus-jariko-vel-vienas-vešanas.d?id=52777081&x_tr_sl=lv&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en-GB&x_tr_pto=nui,elem> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹⁰³ Upleja (n 59).

stepped its competence.¹⁰⁴ Aldis Gobzems, an independent member of the Saeima, urged his fellow parliamentarians not to support Rodiņa because she approved of the Constitutional Court's judgment on same-sex couples.¹⁰⁵ He believed this was a violation of traditional family values found in the Latvian Constitution.¹⁰⁶ Aleksandrs Kiršteins (NA) called on the Saeima to postpone the appointment of any judge to the Constitutional Court as he believed the Court had violated its powers and created chaos by appropriating the role of the legislature.¹⁰⁷

Finally, on 11 March 2021, more than five months after the Constitutional Court vacancy arose, Anita Rodiņa gathered 56 votes in the Saeima and was appointed to the Constitutional Court.¹⁰⁸ Rodiņa was nominated for this position at the beginning of February by coalition members Development/For! (Attīstībai/Par!, AP!), JV and was endorsed by the Judicial Council for the position.¹⁰⁹ However, despite this, there had been no consensus on her candidacy amongst coalition members the day before the vote.¹¹⁰ Rodiņa was appointed only with the additional support of opposition members such as Harmony and ZZS.¹¹¹ The debate about Rodiņa's appointment lasted more than an hour, with the conversation dominated by the work of the Constitutional Court so far, the interference of the Court in politics, as well as the need for the Court overall.¹¹² Inese Voika (AP!) called out certain members of the Saeima for stalling the appointment of a new judge due to ideological differences, which she argued was inappropriate.¹¹³

There was also another important incident recently surrounding a judicial appointment to the Constitutional Court. On 9 December 2021, Irēna Kucina received adequate votes from the Saeima to become a Constitutional Court judge.¹¹⁴ However, her candidacy was plagued by con-

¹⁰⁴ Arājs (n 102).

¹⁰⁵ Upleja (n 59).

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ 'Latvian Parliament Approves New Judge for the Constitutional Court' (*Baltic News Network*, 11 March 2021) <<https://bnn-news.com/latvian-parliament-approves-new-judge-for-the-constitutional-court-222896>> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Upleja (n 59); Laura Selina Flower, 'ST as an Independent Arbitrator in the Legal System: The Judicial Council Supports Rodiņš as a Judge' (*Delfi*, 26 February 2021) <https://www-delfi-lv.translate.google/news/national/politics/st-ka-neatkarigs-arbitrs-tiesiskaja-sistema-tieslietu-padome-atbalsta-rodinu-tiesnesa-amata.d?id=52973979&x_tr_sl=lv&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en-GB&x_tr_pto=nui,elem> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹¹⁰ Upleja (n 59).

¹¹¹ 'Again, There Is No Consensus in the Coalition on the New ST Judge: Rodin's Election Will Need the Support of the Opposition' (*Delfi*, 3 October 2021) <https://www-delfi-lv.translate.google/news/national/politics/koalicija-atkal-nav-vienpratibas-par-jauno-st-tiesnesi-rodinas-ivelesanai-vajadzies-opozicijas-atbalstu.d?id=53009891&x_tr_sl=lv&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en-GB&x_tr_pto=nui,elem> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹¹² Upleja (n 59).

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ 'Latvian Parliament Approves New Judge for the Constitutional Court' (n 108).

trovsky in the months prior to her selection for the post. Judge Kucina's previous role was to act as President Levits' legal advisor and there were several concerning reports before her nomination that President Levits had held phone calls with parliamentarians from AP! where he threatened to criticise the party if they failed to vote for Kucina, his preferred candidate, for the judicial post.¹¹⁵ If these allegations were true, then this would constitute court packing which is a violation of judicial independence and the rule of law.

A further constitutional crisis materialised in Latvia in early 2021 when Sanita Osipova's candidacy to the Supreme Court failed to be approved in the Saeima with 40 MPs voting in her favour, 29 MPs against, and 16 MPs abstaining.¹¹⁶ This was considered a shocking result as Sanita Osipova had previously served as President of the Constitutional Court and was considered a highly qualified and suitable candidate for the position of judge of the Supreme Court. What was troubling about the rejection of her candidacy by certain members of the Saeima was their reasoning. Many parliamentarians from the conservative wing of the Saeima, including ZZS and NA, cited the former Constitutional Court President's support of same-sex couples' rights and the corresponding jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court.¹¹⁷ Emphasis was placed on the landmark decision of the Court of November 2020, which is addressed in section 4 of this paper, as a reason to reject Osipova's candidacy. It was feared she would lead the Supreme Court in deciding cases pertaining to recognition of same-sex partnerships that were coming up on the Supreme Court's list in a similar fashion.¹¹⁸ The Saeima's controversial decision led the Supreme Court to issue a decision after a sitting of its plenary session where the court condemned the inappropriate politicisation of the appointment of a Supreme Court judge.¹¹⁹ In this decision, the Supreme Court drew particular attention to the Saeima's violation of Article 83 of the Latvian Constitution which guarantees the independence of judges from political influence:

From this norm follows an absolute prohibition to punish a judge or otherwise create adverse consequences for him due to his judgments, unless one of the circumstances specified in the Law on

¹¹⁵ Māris Klūga, 'Latvian President Denies Exerting Inappropriate Pressure on Politicians' (LSM.LV, 24 September 2021) <<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/president/lavian-president-denies-exerting-inappropriate-pressure-on-politicians.a422742/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹¹⁶ 'The Saeima Rejects the Candidates for the Post of Supreme Court Judge' (*Jurista Vārds*, 22 February 2022) <https://juristavards-lv.translate.google.com/doc/280708-saeima-noraida-augstakas-tiesas-tiesnesa-amata-kandidati/?_x_tr_sl=lv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Decision No 2 of 18 February 2022 of the plenary of the Supreme Court 'On the Relationship between the Legislature and the Judiciary and the Independence of the Judge' <https://www.at.gov.lv/files/uploads/files/2_Par_Augstako_tiesu/Plenums/plenuma%20lemums2%2018022022_EN.docx> accessed 22 November 2022.

Disciplinary Responsibility of Judges, which may be the basis for the judge's liability, is proven. The decision of the Saeima, based on displeasure with the outcome of a specific case, to deny a Constitutional Court judge the possibility of a further career violates the said Constitutional norm.¹²⁰

This controversy has put the judiciary in a very dangerous position, as now it has become clear that the careers of judges can be hindered due to their political stance on important issues. The placing of ideology considerations above a candidate judge's qualifications is likely to have direct and indirect effects on how judges adjudicate on sensitive political cases.¹²¹ This disagreement between the legislature and the judiciary in such a public manner has major ramifications for the public's perception of the authority of the judiciary as well as the obvious violation of the well-established principle of judicial independence in Latvia.

7 The cost of political attacks on judicial independence and the EU's (lack of) response

The past few years have seen an increasingly tense and adversarial relationship between the judiciary and the other powers of State. These challenges can be summarised as a strategic attack by some members of the Saeima and the government designed to put pressure on the judiciary for political gain. The attacks on the Constitutional Court due to the Saeima's disagreement with the Constitutional Court's reasoning in recent judgments is based on their political and ideological disagreements but it is unacceptable for parliamentarians to attack the legitimacy and standing of an independent court for these reasons.¹²² A leading cause for such a political backlash can be attributed to the central role of populist politics in Latvia.¹²³ Populism, in this context, is understood as a disregard for the essential institutions of checks and balances, such as courts, by the legislature or executive.¹²⁴ This type of political discourse has been a major issue in both Poland and Hungary and so, identifying and understanding such issues are key to preventing the undermining of judicial independence and the rule of law.

This raises the important question of how to prevent attacks on the judiciary in Member States post-accession? This is particularly pertinent given the experience of the EU so far in attempting to halt the tide of populist assaults on judicial independence in countries like Poland and

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ 'The Saeima Rejects the Candidates for the Post of Supreme Court Judge' (n 116).

¹²² Council of Europe, 'Judges: Independence, Efficiency and Responsibilities' (2010) Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)12 paras 17–18.

¹²³ Daunis Auers, 'Populism and Political Party Institutionalisation in the Three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania' (2018) 11(3) *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 341, 349–350.

¹²⁴ Bojan Bugarcic, 'Populism, Liberal Democracy, and the Rule of Law in Central and Eastern Europe' (2008) 41(2) *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 191.

Hungary. One of the ways the EU Commission has attempted to prevent similar fates in other Member States is by introducing an annual rule of law monitoring system called the Annual Rule of Law Reports in 2020.¹²⁵ Additionally, the Rule of Law Conditionality Mechanism under Regulation 2020/2092 was introduced in 2021 and has the power to withhold EU monetary support from Member States.¹²⁶ The Conditionality Mechanism has already been used against Hungary and is expected to have significant persuasive effects in combating rule of law abuses.¹²⁷ I have argued elsewhere that the Rule of Law Reports could be linked to the Conditionality Mechanism as they would help keep track of evolving rule of law concerns within Member States and could later be used for sanctioning purposes.¹²⁸ However, it is important to consider the lack of efficacy of the Rule of Law Reports as they stand now. So far, the reports on Latvia have failed to identify effectively many of the concerns highlighted in this paper which diminishes the purpose of the reporting system and turns a blind eye to problematic developments within Latvia.

Latvia received a reasonably favourable rule of law evaluations in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 reports. In particular, the sections on judicial independence were concise, identifying corruption within the judiciary and controversies surrounding the politicisation of judicial appointments as a cause for concern.¹²⁹ However, the reports failed to appreciate the scale of damage to judicial independence after the multiple instances of politicising courts, attempts at court packing, and the general tarnishing of the reputation of the judiciary. The reports on Latvia's rule of law status offer only a shallow account of the true situation on the ground. The 2021 report on Latvia failed to highlight the extent of the attacks on judicial independence during the past few years. As noted above, the Constitutional Court suffered severe backlash from legislators over its November 2020 decision which affirmed the right to parental leave for same-sex couples as well as for the decision against the merger of Varakļāni with Rēzekne less than ten days before the planned municipal elections. These decisions were followed by a constitutional crisis in which members of the Saeima attempted to ignore Constitutional Court decisions and even called for the abolition of the Court altogether.¹³⁰ What is further concerning is that despite the 2022 report raising the issue of the politici-

¹²⁵ Beatrice Monciunskaitė, 'To Live and to Learn: The EU Commission's Failure to Recognise Rule of Law Deficiencies in Lithuania' (2022) 14(1) *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 49, 56–63.

¹²⁶ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget, Article 2 (a).

¹²⁷ Kati Cseres and Michael Borgers, 'Competition and Conditionality: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle in the Case of Hungary?' (*Verfassungsblog*, 2 June 2022) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/competition-and-conditionality/>> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹²⁸ Monciunskaitė (n 125) 49.

¹²⁹ Commission, 'Commission staff working document – 2020 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the Rule of Law Situation in Latvia' SWD (2020) 313 final.

¹³⁰ Office of the President (n 91).

sation of the appointment of a Supreme Court president in early 2022, the two prior reports failed to mention a similar situation that arose regarding the appointment of a Constitutional Court judge in late 2020 and early 2021.¹³¹ Once again, the rule of law reports failed to acknowledge how deeply rooted such issues are and instead painted them as isolated incidents. These are serious oversights on the EU Commission's part if the purpose of these annual reports are considered.

Given the significant issues described in this paper, the Rule of Law Reports evidently fail to live up to their purpose by ignoring threats to judicial independence in Latvia. Unfortunately, this silence on the threats to judicial independence in a Member State is not surprising given the Commission's track record on this issue. In many ways, we can see the Commission repeating the same mistakes, only this time by ignoring systemic threats to the rule of law in the very reports designed to flag them. Although the reports mention an array of issues affecting judicial independence, they fail to connect the dots and put these events into context. That is, the described events can be attributed to deliberate attacks by other branches of the State towards the judiciary which are severe and should be noted as such. If the subsequent rule of law reports are not strengthened by the introduction of suitable and achievable recommendations, and, above all, thorough consideration of all threats to the rule of law, then there is a risk that small rule of law concerns may develop into significant breaches.

8 Conclusion

This paper has examined the most concerning threats to judicial independence in Latvia. The Latvian political party system shows significant evidence of volatility and instability. The political party landscape in Latvia was poorly regulated in the early years of the country's re-independence which created optimal conditions for the development of a volatile political party system.¹³² The general election in 2018 was declared a victory of populist parties, marking the prominence of anti-establishment and illiberal forces in Latvia.¹³³ While the most recent general election in October 2022 also produced significant wins for new and old populist forces and established centrist parties, it still remains to be seen what type of government coalition will materialise from this election. Nevertheless, it is clear from the issues highlighted in this paper that judicial independence is under threat in Latvia and further research and diligent

¹³¹ Arājs (n 102).

¹³² Auers (n 123) 345–349.

¹³³ Andrew Higgins, 'Populist Wave Hits Latvia, Lifting Pro-Russia Party in Election' *New York Times* (New York, 7 October 2018) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/07/world/europe/latvia-election-russia.html>> accessed 29 November 2022; Daunis Auers and Andres Kasekamp, 'Comparing Radical-Right Populism in Estonia and Latvia' in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral (eds), *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (1st edn, Bloomsbury Publishing 2013).

observation of the institutional dialogue of the branches of the State are imperative. The Latvian judiciary is currently suffering a crisis of independence; structural issues which effect Latvian judicial independence stem from the executive's excessive powers over court budgets.¹³⁴ Besides this, the Minister of Justice has been attempting to attack the Chairman of the Judicial Council in retaliation for the Chairman's politically inconvenient opinions of the current judicial system in Latvia.¹³⁵ There is also a resounding lack of trust and respect for the authority of courts by many prominent political factions. The Constitutional Court has been criticised and attacked by parliamentarians over decisions in the recent parental leave case¹³⁶ and the Varakļāni and Rēzekne self-governing regions case.¹³⁷ These attacks were not comments disagreeing with the Court's reasoning or legal approach, but rather a fundamental attack on the legitimacy of the Constitutional Court's standing. Parliamentarians refused to perform their duties and nominate a replacement judge to the Constitutional Court for this very reason.¹³⁸ Although pro-EU and pro-rule of law parties have played a major role in Latvian governance with New Unity and AP! supporting the Constitutional Court during its crisis, and condemning the attacks on judicial freedom by other parliamentarians, the fact remains that anti-establishment forces carry significant weight in Latvian politics. The evidence in this paper indicates that the foundations of Latvia's democratic institutions are being put into question by populist parliamentarians. The apparent backlash against the authority of the judiciary combined with the prominent role of populism leaves the country vulnerable to populist power-grabs. Although Latvia's rule of law is not suffering to the extent seen in Poland and Hungary, this does not mean scholars and civil society should become complacent. After all, Hungary was once classified as a consolidated democracy and was only recently downgraded. This shows that no democracy is ever fully 'complete' and the threat of regression is always on the horizon if we are not vigilant.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Law on Judicial Power (Article 50.2(3) of 1993), 1 January 1993, Reporter of the Supreme Council and Government of the Republic of Latvia <<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/62847-on-judicial-power>> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹³⁵ Dreiblat and Rozenbergs (n 44).

¹³⁶ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia 12 November 2020 in case no 2019-33-01, 2020, Latvia Journal <[https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search\[number\]=2019-33-01](https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/cases/?-search[number]=2019-33-01)> accessed 29 November 2022.

¹³⁷ Judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia in case no 2020-43-0106.

¹³⁸ Upleja (n 59).

¹³⁹ Jacques Rupnik and Jan Zielonka, 'Introduction: The State of Democracy 20 Years On: Domestic and External Factors' (2013) 27 *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 3, 21; Bojan Bugarič, 'A Crisis of Constitutional Democracy in Post-Communist Europe: "Lands in-between" Democracy and Authoritarianism' (2015) 13(1) *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 219, 221 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/mov010>> accessed 29 November 2022.



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PROPORTIONALITY OF INTERNAL BORDER CONTROLS: FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TO THE 2021 PROPOSAL

Léa Schumacker*

Abstract: Most Schengen Member States reintroduced internal border controls in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These controls, which in some instances lasted for several months, jeopardised the principle of an area without borders and had to comply with the principle of proportionality. This article examines four aspects of these controls related to proportionality: the type of threat invoked, the adequacy of the measures, the duration of the controls, and the scrutiny over proportionality. First, it demonstrates that the current Schengen Borders Code contains appropriate safeguards for each aspect. However, some Schengen Member States disregarded them during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Commission did not use its scrutiny powers. In December 2021, the Commission proposed to amend the Schengen Borders Code. This 2021 proposal adapts the rules to the Schengen Member States' practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, this article argues that this proposal improves the aspects of legal certainty and scrutiny but does not satisfactorily address the aspects of adequacy and duration of internal border controls. In addition, the article presents some recommendations to increase the proportionality of the controls that the Schengen Member States would reintroduce following the 2021 proposal.

Keywords: Schengen Borders Code, proportionality, internal border controls, Covid-19, 2021 proposal, health emergency, NORDIC INFO, scrutiny.

1 Introduction

'A crisis without borders cannot be resolved by putting barriers between us. And yet, this is exactly the first reflex that many European countries had. This simply makes no sense'.¹ With these words, President von der Leyen of the European Commission (Commission) condemned, among other things, the reintroduction of internal border controls within

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¹ Commission, 'Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on the European coordinated response to the COVID-19 outbreak' (26 March 2020) SPEECH/20/532.

the Schengen area² during the COVID-19 pandemic. This recent crisis³ is not the only one that has put this border-free area under severe strain. The past seven years have been particularly challenging. Indeed, besides the pandemic, numerous Member States⁴ reintroduced internal border controls for months during the migration crisis of the mid-2010s⁵ and after the terrorist attacks in the European Union (EU) in 2015-2016.⁶ These crises⁷ have shown that the benefits of European integration should not be taken for granted.⁸

Freedom of movement and the possibility of border-free travel are two intertwined mechanisms.⁹ They are essential to establish an area where persons may move freely, without internal borders,¹⁰ which is one of the

² As of September 2022, as during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Schengen area encompasses twenty-six European countries: these are also Member States of the European Union, except for Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein.

³ Commission, 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (2021 Proposal)' COM (2021) 891 final 1. The COVID-19 pandemic is the global outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This virus quickly spread from China, where it was first detected in December 2019, to the rest of the world. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization declared a Public Health Emergency of Internal Concern and on 11 March 2020 it characterised the outbreak as a pandemic. World Health Organization, 'Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic' <<https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>> accessed 1 September 2022.

⁴ When this article refers to 'Member States', the expression should be understood as to include the twenty-six European States that are part of the Schengen area.

⁵ COM (2021) 891 final 1. For further information about the reintroduction of internal border controls during the migration crisis in 2015-2016, see Elspeth Guild, 'Schengen Borders and Multiple National States of Emergency: From Refugees to Terrorism to COVID-19' (2021) 23 *European Journal of Migration and Law* 385, 390-393.

⁶ COM (2021) 891 final 1. For further information on the reintroduction of internal border controls following the terrorist threat, see Guild (n 5) 393-397.

⁷ Guild distinguishes the first two crises from the one resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The first two were framed as issues with external border controls, while the most recent crisis concerned internal borders and the internal market. Guild (n 5) 386-387.

⁸ Hanneke van Eijken and Jorrit Rijpma, 'Stopping a Virus from Moving Freely: Border Controls and Travel Restrictions in Times of Corona' (2021) 17 *Utrecht Law Review* 34, 34. Between 2006 and 2014, Member States reintroduced internal border controls only 35 times. However, from the start of the mentioned crises in 2015, there was a significant increase in the number of internal border controls. Between 1 January 2015 and 1 September 2022, the Member States reintroduced internal border controls 299 times. Commission, 'List of Member States' notifications of the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders pursuant to Article 25 and 28 et seq of the Schengen Borders Code' (1 September 2022). PDF available at <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control_en> accessed 1 September 2022.

⁹ Daniel Schade, *Crisis-proof Schengen and Freedom of Movement: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Hertie School - Jacques Delors Centre 2021) 2; Elspeth Guild, 'Covid-19 Using Border Controls to Fight a Pandemic? Reflections From the European Union' (2020) 2 *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 1, 2.

¹⁰ This objective of the EU of offering 'an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, in which the free movement of persons is ensured [...]' is set in Article 3(2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

main achievements of the EU.¹¹ Freedom of movement of persons is one of the four freedoms guaranteed in the EU. It is enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),¹² the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Charter),¹³ and Directive 2004/38/EC (Free Movement Directive).¹⁴ The abolition of border controls is limited to the Schengen area and *de facto* facilitates the movement of persons.¹⁵ The TFEU¹⁶ and Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code or

¹¹ Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code) [2016] OJ L77/1, Recital 22; Joined Cases C-368/20 and C-369/20 *NW v Landespolizeidirektion Steiermark* ECLI:EU:C:2022:298, para 65. In a 2018 survey, 68% of EU respondents perceived the Schengen area as one of the EU's main achievements. Kantar Public, Special Eurobarometer 474: European perceptions of the Schengen Area: Summary (Survey requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs and co-ordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication, 2018) 10.

¹² Article 20(2)(a) TFEU reads as follows: '2. Citizens of the Union shall enjoy the rights and be subject to the duties provided for in the Treaties. They shall have, inter alia:

(a) *the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States*' (emphasis added).

Article 21(1) TFEU reads as follows:

'1. *Every citizen of the Union shall have the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States*, subject to the limitations and conditions laid down in the Treaties and by the measures adopted to give them effect' (emphasis added).

¹³ Article 45(1) of the Charter reads as follows: 'Freedom of movement and of residence

1. *Every citizen of the Union has the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States*' (emphasis added).

¹⁴ Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States amending Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 and repealing Directives 64/221/EEC, 68/360/EEC, 72/194/EEC, 73/148/EEC, 75/34/EEC, 75/35/EEC, 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 93/96/EEC (Text with EEA relevance) [2004] OJ L158/77 (Free Movement Directive). This Directive is frequently mentioned in discussions about freedom of movement during the COVID-19 pandemic since it contains a chapter on the right of exit and entry. This article focuses on the reintroduction of internal border controls and the Schengen Borders Code. Therefore, it does not discuss further Directive 2004/38/EC.

¹⁵ European Court of Auditors, *Free Movement in the EU During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Limited Scrutiny of Internal Border Controls, and Uncoordinated Actions by Member States* (Special Report, 2022) para 4.

¹⁶ Article 67(2) TFEU reads as follows:

'2. [The Union] shall ensure the absence of internal border controls for persons and shall frame a common policy on asylum, immigration and external border control, based on solidarity between Member States, which is fair towards third-country nationals. For the purpose of this Title, stateless persons shall be treated as third-country nationals' (emphasis added).

Article 77(1)(a) TFEU reads as follows:

'1. The Union shall develop a policy with a view to:

(a) *ensuring the absence of any controls on persons, whatever their nationality, when crossing internal borders*' (emphasis added).

SBC)¹⁷ guarantee the absence of internal border controls.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the precautionary measures adopted to limit the spread of the novel virus was the reintroduction of internal border controls.¹⁸ Member States also adopted other measures to contain the pandemic, such as lockdowns, curfews, and travel restrictions.¹⁹ The reintroduction of border controls was often a prerequisite to enforcing other restrictive measures, such as entry bans,²⁰ and was financially costly for the Member States²¹ and the internal market.²² As a general caveat, this article focuses solely on the temporary reintroduction of internal border controls in the Schengen area; it does not cover additional requirements to cross borders, such as the presentation of a negative antigen test, or the reintroduction of external border controls.²³

¹⁷ Paragraph 1 of Article 1 SBC reads as follows: ‘This Regulation provides for the *absence of border control of persons crossing the internal borders between the Member States of the Union*’ (emphasis added).

Article 22 SBC reads as follows: ‘Crossing internal borders

Internal borders may be crossed at any point without a border check on persons, irrespective of their nationality, being carried out’ (emphasis added).

¹⁸ COM (2021) 891 final 19.

¹⁹ Marco Stefan and Ngo Chun Luk, *Limitations on Human Mobility in Response to COVID-19: A Preliminary Mapping and Assessment of National and EU Policy Measures, Their Sanctioning Frameworks, Implementation Tools and Enforcement Practices* (CEPS Paper in Liberty and Security in Europe, 2021) 10.

²⁰ Aude Bouveresse, ‘La libre circulation des personnes à l’épreuve de la Covid-19: *extremis malis extrema remedia?*’ (2020) 3 *Revue trimestrielle de droit européen* 509, 513; Commission, ‘Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders’ SWD (2021) 462 final 13; Daniel Thym and Jonas Bornemann, ‘Schengen and Free Movement Law During the First Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Of Symbolism, Law and Politics’ (2020) 5 *European Papers* 1143, 1146.

²¹ In 2016, the administrative costs due to the increase in staff for border controls were estimated between EUR 0.6 and EUR 5.8 billion, while the costs of physically establishing internal border controls were approximately EUR 7.1 billion for the entire Schengen area. Given inflation, the costs would be even higher during the COVID-19 pandemic. Andrew Lilico, Summayah Leghari and Marika Hegg, *The Cost of Non-Schengen: Impact of Border Controls within Schengen on the Single Market* (Study requested by the European Added Value Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value) 2016, 9. Moreover, it is likely that staff temporarily assigned to border controls come from other services, resulting in shortages in those services. ‘Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the 2021 Proposal’ (n 20) 26.

²² A 2016 study estimated the economic costs for a two-year reintroduction of internal border controls by seven participating states at up to €5 billion and by the entire Schengen area at up to €50 billion. Lilico, Leghari and Hegg (n 21) 9. Given inflation, the costs would be even higher during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as of September 2022, there exists no study yet about the economic impact of border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Salomon and Rijpma argue that the reintroduction of internal border controls also has negative effects on European citizenship. Stefan Salomon and Jorrit Rijpma, ‘A Europe Without Internal Frontiers: Challenging the Reintroduction of Border Controls in the Schengen Area in the Light of Union Citizenship’ 2021 *German Law Journal* (‘Online First’) 1, 23–25.

²³ According to Article 2(10) SBC, border controls consist of border checks and border surveillance. They can take various forms, but usually consist of identity checks. For further information on border controls and what they entail, see Subsection 3.2.2.1 below.

The Schengen Borders Code lays down conditions and procedures for the reintroduction of internal border controls 'to ensure that they are exceptional and that the principle of proportionality is respected'.²⁴ Proportionality is a general principle of EU law²⁵ applicable to conflicts between two interests or rights claims.²⁶ It requires that measures are appropriate to pursue a legitimate objective and are the least restrictive.²⁷ Proportionality binds the EU institutions and Member States,²⁸ including in the application of the Schengen Borders Code.²⁹ This article uses proportionality as a standard to analyse the internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the corresponding rules of the Schengen Borders Code, as it stands and as it might soon be amended.

Internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic raised a number of (legal) questions giving rise to heated debates. These interrogations are particularly relevant nowadays for two reasons. Firstly, in December 2021, the European Commission published a proposal to amend the Schengen Borders Code (2021 proposal).³⁰ This proposal aims, among other things, to clarify and expand the procedural safeguards in the case of the unilateral reintroductions of internal border controls and to encourage the use of alternative measures.³¹ On 1 September 2022, the European Parliament was in the reporting phase,³²

²⁴ SBC, Recital 22. The European Court of Justice made a reference to this recital in paragraphs 59 and 74 of NW (n 11).

²⁵ Juliane Kokott and Christoph Sobotta, 'The Evolution of the Principle of Proportionality in EU Law: Towards an Anticipative Understanding?' in Stefan Vogenauer and Stephen Weatherill (eds), *General Principles of Law: European and Comparative Perspectives* (OUP 2017) 168; Wolf Sauter, 'Proportionality in EU Law: A Balancing Act?' (2017) 15 *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies* 439, 442; Tor-Inge Harbo, 'The Function of the Proportionality Principle' (2010) 16 *European Law Journal* 158, 159.

²⁶ Harbo (n 25) 158.

²⁷ *ibid* 165; Kokott and Sobotta (n 25) 168; Sauter (n 25) 448.

²⁸ Sauter (n 25) 440. The ECJ applies the proportionality test differently to acts of the EU institutions and acts of the Member States. The EU institutions are subject to a manifestly disproportionate test, while the Member States are bound by modified versions of a least restrictive means test. Sauter (n 25) 439–440, 445, and 465; Harbo (n 25) 172.

²⁹ For further information, see Part 2 below. In its Communication of 16 March 2020, the Commission encouraged the Member States to apply internal border controls in a 'proportionate manner'. Commission, 'COVID-19 – Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services' (Information) COM (2020) 1753 final, para 19. The European Court of Auditors would have appreciated if the Commission had given detailed advice on how the border controls reintroduced in the specific context of the pandemic could comply with the general principle of proportionality. European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 56.

³⁰ COM (2021) 891 final. Part 4 of this article covers the 2021 proposal in more detail.

³¹ *ibid* 7–8.

³² Costica Dumbrava, 'Revision of the Schengen Borders Code' (*Legislative Train Schedule*, 20 August 2022) <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-promoting-our-european-way-of-life/file-revision-of-the-schengen-borders-code?sid=6101>> accessed 1 September 2022. On 31 March 2022, MEP Sylvie Guillaume was designated to draw up a report on the 2021 proposal. European Parliament, 'Procedure file 2021/0428(COD)' (2022) <<https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/printficheplayers.pdf?id=733495&lang=en>> accessed 1 September 2022). On 1 September 2022, this report was not yet ready.

whereas the Council of the European Union (Council) adopted a general approach to the proposal during the Schengen Council of 10 June 2022.³³ Secondly, in February 2022, the Dutch-speaking Court of First Instance of Brussels sent a preliminary reference to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to interpret the Schengen Borders Code.³⁴ In essence,³⁵ the Belgian court asked, among other things, ‘whether, in times of crisis, an infectious disease can be equated with a threat to public policy or internal security within the meaning of Articles 23(a) and 25 [SBC]’³⁶ and explicitly referred to the 2021 proposal.³⁷ Thus, the ECJ will soon have to decide, in the *NORDIC INFO* case, on some issues related to internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Building upon those considerations, this article answers the following research question: to what extent do the Schengen Borders Code and the 2021 proposal to amend it ensure that proportionality is respected when it comes to the reintroduction of border controls at the internal borders of the Schengen area in situations of health emergencies?

To answer this research question, this article first determines in Part 2 which aspects of proportionality the Member States must respect when they reintroduce internal border controls based on the Schengen Borders Code. Then, it is organised symmetrically and comprises two main parts: Part 3 concerns the internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Part 4 covers the 2021 proposal. Each consists of two main sections: one presents the topic, and the other contains an assessment of proportionality. Part 3 starts with the legal framework applicable to the reintroduction of internal border controls during the COVID-19 pandemic. Section 3.2 investigates how the Schengen Borders Code ensures that proportionality is respected when reintroducing these controls. It focuses on four aspects of proportionality: the type of threat, the adequacy of the measures, the duration of the controls, and the scrutiny over proportionality. Section 3.3 summarises the findings of the pro-

³³ Council of the European Union, ‘Schengen Borders Code: Council adopts its general approach’ (Press release 534/22, 10 June 2022).

³⁴ Request for a preliminary ruling from the *Nederlandstalige rechtbank van eerste aanleg Brussel* (Belgium) lodged on 23 February 2022 — *NORDIC INFO v Belgische Staat* (Case C-128/22) [2022] OJ C213/26). In this pending case, a travel organisation had to cancel all its trips from Belgium to Sweden following the prohibition of non-essential travel from and to Belgium issued by the Belgian federal government. Three days after the issue of the prohibition, the Belgian government again authorised, while advising against, non-essential trips to Sweden. The travel organisation claims compensation for the damage it suffered following the change in travel advice of the Belgian government. Case C-128/22: Summary of the request for a preliminary ruling (Working document, 23 February 2022) paras 1–4.

³⁵ This question about the scope of public policy and internal security is not one of the questions explicitly referred to the ECJ. It appears in the argumentation of the parties and the observations of the referring court.

³⁶ Case C-128/22, para 18. This notion of ‘threat to public policy or internal security’ is subject to debate as to whether it encompasses ‘public health emergencies’. Subsection 3.2.1 below discusses this matter further.

³⁷ *ibid*, para 20.

proportionality assessment. Then, Part 4 begins with a presentation of the 2021 proposal and its main amendments to the rules on the reintroduction of internal border controls. Section 4.2 investigates whether the proposal would provide additional safeguards concerning proportionality when Member States reintroduce internal border controls during health emergencies. It focuses on the same four aspects of proportionality. Section 4.3 recapitulates and offers some recommendations for improving the 2021 proposal on each aspect. Finally, Part 5 summarises the findings of Parts 3 and 4 and provides an answer to the research question.

This article primarily uses a legal doctrinal methodology. It also resorts to an evaluative methodology when determining how the Schengen Borders Code and the 2021 proposal ensure respect for the principle of proportionality. The sources perused to write this article are primary sources from the EU institutions, such as regulations, judgments, and proposals, and secondary sources, including academic journal articles, book chapters, blog posts, and reports. However, the recent publication of the 2021 proposal limits the number of sources on the topic.

2 Proportionality and Schengen Borders Code

In this article, proportionality is the standard to examine the internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and their legal basis in the Schengen Borders Code. When assessing the proportionality of a measure under EU law, the EU relies on a four-step test. The measure must:

- 1) be appropriate – also called the suitability test –
- 2) to pursue a legitimate objective – also called the legality test,
- 3) constitute the least restrictive measure – also called the necessity test, and
- 4) not be manifestly disproportionate – also called proportionality *stricto sensu*.³⁸

If a measure fails to meet any requirement, it will be disproportionate.³⁹ The ECJ does not always apply all four steps consistently.⁴⁰ The exact content of the test depends on the area of EU law and the degree of harmonisation.⁴¹

³⁸ Kokott and Sobotta (n 25) 168; Sauter (n 25) 448. The order of the steps varies between the two sources, but the steps remain the same.

³⁹ Kokott and Sobotta (n 25) 168.

⁴⁰ Sauter (n 25) 448. Usually, the least restrictive measure test and the final balancing are alternatives rather than complements (*ibid*).

⁴¹ *ibid* 454–455; Harbo (n 25) 180. For instance, the test applicable to freedom of establishment includes a requirement that the measure is non-discriminatory, which is not explicit in the general proportionality test. Sauter (n 25) 455. Additionally, the greater the impact of the measure on the EU interest, the stricter the proportionality test is likely to be. Sauter (n 25) 453.

This article argues that Article 26 SBC defines the steps of the proportionality test relevant for the reintroduction of internal border controls and constitutes a *lex specialis* to the general four-step test. When Member States reintroduce or prolong internal border controls based on Article 25 or 28(1) SBC, ie when the serious threat to public policy or internal security is foreseeable or unforeseeable, Article 26 requires them to assess ‘*the extent to which such a measure is likely to adequately remedy the threat to public policy or internal security, and [...] the proportionality of the measure in relation to that threat*’. Three aspects of proportionality can be extracted from the wording of Article 26 SBC:

- 1) The type of threat, ie a serious threat to public policy or internal security – related to the legitimate objective of the general proportionality test, but not identical;
- 2) The extent to which the reintroduction of internal border controls is likely to adequately remedy the threat – comparable to the suitability test; and
- 3) The proportionality of the measure in relation to the threat – similar to the *stricto sensu* balancing.

Additionally, when conducting the assessment required in Article 26 SBC, Member States must consider the likely impact of the threat on their public policy or internal security and of such a measure on the free movement of persons.⁴² Furthermore, they bear the burden of proof to justify the necessity and proportionality of the reintroduction of internal border controls.⁴³ This burden of proof is incremental with the prolongation of controls.⁴⁴ This proportionality requirement is reinforced by the Member States’ duty to conduct an ex-post assessment of proportionality after the lifting of internal border controls⁴⁵ and the Commission’s obligation to issue an opinion if it ‘has concerns as regards the necessity or proportionality of the planned reintroduction of border control at internal borders’.⁴⁶ This scrutiny aspect is not a step of the general proportionality test. Yet, a discussion on proportionality is not complete without mentioning the measures to control the respect for proportionality. Hence, this article also discusses the scrutiny over proportionality as a fourth aspect. Parts 3 and 4 below base their analysis of the proportionality of the internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Schengen Borders Code, as it is and as it could be amended, on the three aspects extracted from Article 26 SBC and this fourth aspect of scrutiny. In order to narrow down the balancing exercise of the third aspect, ie proportionality *stricto sensu*, this article focuses on the duration of internal border controls.

⁴² SBC, Article 26(a) and (b).

⁴³ Sergio Carrera and Ngo Chun Luk, *In the Name of COVID-19: An Assessment of the Schengen Internal Border Controls and Travel Restrictions in the EU* (Study requested by the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 2020) 49.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ SBC, Article 33, 1st paragraph.

⁴⁶ *ibid* Article 27(4), 2nd paragraph.

3 Proportionality of internal border controls reintroduced during the Covid-19 pandemic

3.1 Articles 25 and 28 SBC during the COVID-19 pandemic

As a general rule, Article 22 SBC states that '[i]nternal borders may be crossed at any point without a border check on persons, irrespective of their nationality, being carried out'.⁴⁷ Chapter II of Title III of the Code provides for three exceptions for the temporary reintroduction of internal border controls: when there is a serious foreseeable threat to public policy or internal security, when the same kind of threat is unforeseeable, and where exceptional circumstances put the overall functioning of the Schengen area at risk.⁴⁸ Resort to these exceptions is not new, but the recurrence and scale of internal border controls over the last two and a half years are unprecedented.⁴⁹ The Member States did not coordinate their controls.⁵⁰ The duration, intensity and territorial coverage of the controls varied greatly from Member State to Member State and from the first wave of contagion to the other waves.⁵¹

Between 1 February 2020 and 30 April 2022,⁵² Member States notified the Commission 182 times of the reintroduction of internal border controls under Articles 25 and 28 SBC for reasons of 'Coronavirus

⁴⁷ 'Internal borders' are defined in Article 2(1) SBC as:

(a) the common land borders, including river and lake borders, of the Member States;
(b) the airports of the Member States for internal flights;
(c) sea, river and lake ports of the Member States for regular internal ferry connections'.

⁴⁸ SBC, Articles 25–35.

⁴⁹ Sandra Mantu, 'Schengen, Free Movement and Crises: Links, Effects and Challenges' (2021) 23 *European Journal of Migration and Law* 377, 377; Salla Heinikoski, *COVID-19 Bends the Rules on Border Controls: Yet Another Crisis Undermining the Schengen Acquis?* (FIIA Briefing Paper 2020) 3. Until 2014 and the start of the migration crisis, the provisions on the reintroduction of internal border controls were used for specific events, such as high-level political meetings, mass events, demonstrations, and sports events, and only for a few days. It was a short-term solution completely different from the massive reintroduction of border controls during the COVID-19 pandemic that lasted for months. Fabian Gülzau, 'A "New Normal" for the Schengen Area. When, Where and Why Member States Reintroduce Temporary Border Controls?' (2021) *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 1, 2–3 and 13.

⁵⁰ Philippe De Bruycker, 'The COVID Virus Crisis Resurrects the Public Health Exception in EU Migration Law' (2021) 2 *Frontiers in Political Science* 1, 6; Guild (n 9) 2.

⁵¹ Stefano Montaldo, 'Internal Border Control in the Schengen Area and Health Threats: Any Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic?' (2021) 23 *European Journal of Migration and Law* 405, 408; Sergio Carrera and Ngo Chun Luk, *Love Thy Neighbour? Coronavirus Politics and Their Impact on EU Freedoms and Rule of Law in the Schengen Area* (CEPS Paper in Liberty and Security in Europe 2020) 2–3. The exact dates of the waves of contamination differ among the Member States. It is commonly accepted that the first wave took place in spring 2020, the second in autumn 2020, and the third in spring 2021. Stefan and Luk (n 19) 23.

⁵² The epidemiological data improved in spring 2022: there were fewer infections and admissions to hospitals. Since 30 April 2022, there has not been any new notification of the reintroduction of internal border controls for reasons of 'Coronavirus COVID-19'. Therefore, the number of notifications related to the COVID-19 pandemic did not change between May 2022 and August 2022.

COVID-19'.⁵³ Articles 25 and 28 SBC are complementary and provide for different procedures for the reintroduction of border controls.⁵⁴ The following paragraphs analyse these two provisions, their requirements, and recourse to them by the Member States during the pandemic. The third procedure for the reintroduction of internal border controls, provided for in Article 29, is not discussed further because it requires a Council recommendation which the institution did not issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁵

At the outset of the pandemic, most Member States relied on Article 28 SBC.⁵⁶ This article contains the specific procedure for situations requiring immediate action due to a serious threat to public policy or internal security.⁵⁷ Member States must notify the Commission and the other Member States at the same time as they reintroduce border controls.⁵⁸ The controls may be maintained for a limited period of up to ten

⁵³ Commission, 'List of Member States' notifications of the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders pursuant to Article 25 and 28 et seq of the Schengen Borders Code' (30 April 2022). PDF available at <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control_en> accessed 30 April 2022. The notifications also include border controls that start after 30 April since border controls reintroduced under Article 25 of the Schengen Borders Code require prior notifications (SBC, Article 27(1)). At the outbreak of the pandemic, France, Austria, Denmark, Norway, and Germany already had some internal border controls in place for reasons of migration or terrorism. They added a health reason on top of this and did not start a new six-month period at that time. Moreover, Luxembourg and Greece did not reintroduce internal border controls at the beginning of the pandemic. Sarah Wolff, Ariadna Ripoll Servent and Agathe Piquet, 'Framing Immobility: Schengen Governance in Times of Pandemics' (2020) 42 *Journal of European Integration* 1127, 1130.

⁵⁴ Jörg Gerkrath, 'The Reintroduction of Internal EU Border Controls: A Disproportionate, Ineffective and Illegal Instrument of Combating the Pandemic' (2021) 47 *EU Law Live – Weekend Edition* 2, 3; Stefano Montaldo, 'The COVID-19 Emergency and the Reintroduction of Internal Border Controls in the Schengen Area: Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste' (2020) 5 *European Papers* 523, 525.

⁵⁵ Since 2013, the Article 29 procedure has been available when the overall functioning of the Schengen area is at risk. Based on a Commission proposal, the Council may recommend that certain Member States reintroduce internal border controls for a maximum of six months, renewable three times (SBC, Article 29(1)-(2)). On 12 May 2016, the Council resorted to this mechanism and recommended that Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway reintroduce internal border controls for six months due to the migration crisis and security threats. Council of the European Union, 'Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2016/894 of 12 May 2016 setting out a recommendation for a temporary internal border control in exceptional circumstances putting the overall functioning of the Schengen area at risk' [2016] OJ L151/8. The Council made this recommendation three more times, in November 2016, February 2017, and May 2017 (European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 28) but not during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁵⁶ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 54. For further information on the internal border controls reintroduced by the Member States between March 2020 and August 2020 inclusive, see Carrera and Luk (n 43); for the reintroduction of internal border controls between 1999 and 2020, see Gülzau (n 49).

⁵⁷ SBC, Article 28(1).

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, Article 28(2).

days⁵⁹ and be prolonged for renewable periods of up to twenty days.⁶⁰ In any event, the period of reintroduction of internal border controls under Article 28 may not exceed two months.⁶¹

Subsequently, when the maximum period of two months had elapsed, the Member States could no longer rely on Article 28 SBC. They then used Article 25 in conjunction with Article 27 SBC.⁶² Article 25 SBC provides the general framework for the temporary reintroduction of internal border control in foreseeable cases where there is a serious threat to public policy or internal security and when 'immediate or urgent actions are not required'.⁶³ Member States must notify the Commission, the other Member States, the European Parliament, and the Council at the latest four weeks before the planned reintroduction or within a shorter period if the circumstances become known later.⁶⁴ Border controls may be reintroduced 'for a limited period of up to 30 days or for the foreseeable duration of the serious threat if its duration exceeds 30 days'.⁶⁵ Thereafter, they may be prolonged for renewable periods of up to 30 days.⁶⁶ The total duration may not exceed six months under Article 25. However, if exceptional circumstances resulting from 'persistent serious deficiencies relating to external border control', putting the overall functioning of the Schengen area without internal border control at risk materialise, Member States may prolong their controls for up to two years.⁶⁷ During the COVID-19 pandemic, such exceptional circumstances mentioned in Article 29 SBC did not occur and hence the Council did not issue a recommendation,⁶⁸ so the Member States could not legally extend their internal border controls for two years. They could only rely on Articles 25 and 28 SBC to reintroduce internal border controls. The following section assesses the proportionality of the measures taken pursuant to these two articles during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2 Four aspects of proportionality during the COVID-19 pandemic

3.2.1 First aspect: type of threat

The first aspect of proportionality concerns the type of threat invoked by Member States to reintroduce internal border controls during

⁵⁹ *ibid*, Article 28(1).

⁶⁰ *ibid*, Article 28(3).

⁶¹ *ibid*, Article 28(4).

⁶² Only Iceland remained within the maximum period set in Article 28 SBC and did not subsequently rely on Article 25 SBC. Carrera and Luk (n 43) 54.

⁶³ SBC, Article 25(1).

⁶⁴ *ibid*, Article 27(1)-(2).

⁶⁵ *ibid*, Article 25(1).

⁶⁶ *ibid*, Article 25(3).

⁶⁷ *ibid*, Article 25(4).

⁶⁸ *ibid*, Article 29(1); Montaldo (n 54) 525.

the COVID-19 pandemic. It relates to the legality test of the general proportionality test, but is not identical. Protecting public health is a legitimate objective to pursue. However, the question is whether this is one of the grounds in the Schengen Borders Code for the reintroduction of internal border controls. Articles 25 and 28 SBC provide that Member States may only reintroduce internal border controls when there is a 'serious threat to public policy or internal security'. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Member States took some precautionary measures primarily to protect public health.⁶⁹ Subsection 3.2.1.1 presents the two main arguments raised in this debate: on one hand, public health falls under public policy or internal security, and, on the other hand, public health is not a ground provided for in the Schengen Borders Code. Then, Subsection 3.2.1.2 focuses on a case pending before the ECJ concerning this ground of 'public health', *NORDIC INFO*,⁷⁰ and suggests a line of reasoning that the ECJ might follow in this future judgment.

3.2.1.1 Debate about public health as a type of threat

On one hand, academics accepting public health as part of public policy or internal security rely on the Communication of the Commission of 16 March 2020⁷¹ and the broad interpretation of these concepts. First, Montaldo, Brosset, and Ramji-Nogales and Goldner Lang argue that the Commission reckons that, in principle, border controls are an appropriate response to a pandemic, which is then a matter of public policy or internal security.⁷² They rely on this statement from the Commission: 'Member States may reintroduce temporary border controls at internal borders if justified for reasons of public policy or internal security. In an extremely critical situation, a Member State can identify a need to rein-

⁶⁹ Wolff, Ripoll Servent and Piquet (n 53) 1135. Internal border controls were primarily reintroduced to slow down the spread of the coronavirus. At the same time, they prevented people from stockpiling or seeking medical assistance in the neighbouring Member States, or temporarily relocating to regions with better epidemiological data. Heinikoski (n 49) 6. On the other hand, Carrera and Chun Luk argue that Member States invoked the protection of public health even though health checks did not seem to be the primary objective of the reintroduction of border controls. Carrera and Luk (n 51) 27.

⁷⁰ Request for a preliminary ruling from the Nederlandstalige rechtbank van eerste aanleg Brussel (Belgium) lodged on 23 February 2022 — *NORDIC INFO v Belgische Staat* (Case C-128/22) [2022] OJ C213/26).

⁷¹ COM (2020) 1753 final.

⁷² Montaldo (n 54) 528; Estelle Brosset, 'Le droit de l'Union européenne des pandémies à l'épreuve de la crise de la Covid-19: entre confinement et déconfinement' (2020) 3 *Revue trimestrielle de droit européen* 493, 495; Jaya Ramji-Nogales and Iris Goldner Lang, 'Freedom of Movement, Migration, and Borders' (2020) 19 *Journal of Human Rights* 593, 596–597. Carrera and Chun Luk consider that the communication set an alarming precedent for current and future derogations. Carrera and Luk (n 43) 57–58. On the other hand, Gerkrath believes that not too much weight should be accorded to the communication of the Commission since it is not legally binding and only reflects the view of one EU institution. Moreover, he adds that there is no evidence that the Commission conducted a thorough examination of the legality of the national decisions before adopting its position. Gerkrath (n 54) 8.

roduce border controls as a reaction to the risk posed by a contagious disease'.⁷³

Second, Montaldo, De Bruycker, Brosset, Thym, Bornemann, Commissioner Johansson, and van Eijken and Rijpma argue that the concept of public policy or internal security comprises public health concerns arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, sometimes with some limitations. The scope of public policy and internal security is unclear and varies between Member States.⁷⁴ Montaldo considers that the health emergency spilt over and affected the community's social and economic life and the regular functioning of key public services.⁷⁵ De Bruycker bases his opinion mainly on the absence of treatment (especially at the beginning of the pandemic) and the threat of the virus to the entire population.⁷⁶ Brosset emphasises the broad scope of public policy and internal security,⁷⁷ while Thym highlights the numerous fundamental society interests affected by the outbreak.⁷⁸ Thym and Bornemann deem that the severe social, economic and health effects of the pandemic meet the threshold of public policy.⁷⁹ Commissioner Johansson stated that '[i]n an extremely critical situation, public policy could include reasons of public health'.⁸⁰

⁷³ COM (2020) 1753 final, para 18 (emphasis added). Rittleng considers that the Commission legitimised *a posteriori* the controls reintroduced by the Member States. Dominique Rittleng, 'L'Union européenne et la pandémie de Covid-19: de la vertu des crises' (2020) 3 Revue trimestrielle de droit européen 483, 485. Commissioner Johansson repeated the exact words of the communication in her answer to an MEP's question on 24 July 2020. Ylva Johansson, 'Answer given by Ms Johansson on behalf of the European Commission to question for written answer E-001971/2020' (*European Parliament*, 24 July 2020) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-001971-ASW_EN.html> accessed 1 September 2022. Additionally, in her statement of 12 August 2020, Commissioner Johansson stated that the decision to reintroduce internal border controls 'may be taken, in extremely critical situations, based on a threat to public health'. Ylva Johansson, 'Answer given by Ms Johansson on behalf of the European Commission to question for written answer E-001827/2020' (*European Parliament*, 12 August 2020) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-001827-ASW_EN.html> accessed 1 September 2022).

⁷⁴ Montaldo (n 51) 419. Usually, the notion of public policy refers to threats to fundamental interests of the States and internal security can be invoked, for example, in situations of disrupted provision of essential services. Montaldo (n 54) 527.

⁷⁵ Montaldo (n 51) 416-417. Montaldo broadens his reasoning to any public health emergency reaching a certain threshold of seriousness and magnitude (ibid 419).

⁷⁶ De Bruycker (n 50) 4.

⁷⁷ Brosset (n 72) 495.

⁷⁸ Daniel Thym, 'Travel Bans in Europe: A Legal Appraisal' (*Verfassungsblog*, 19 March 2020) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/travel-bans-in-europe-a-legal-appraisal/>> accessed 1 September 2022.

⁷⁹ Thym and Bornemann (n 20) 1148. In addition, Thym and Bornemann contend that the Schengen Borders Code includes public health concerns arising from a pandemic when interpreted in the light of Article 35 of the Charter. That article guarantees that '[a] high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the [...] implementation of all the Union's policies and activities'. Ibid 1149.

⁸⁰ Ylva Johansson, 'Answer given by Ms Johansson on behalf of the European Commission to priority question for written answer P-001115/2020' (*European Parliament*, 15 June 2020) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2020-001115-ASW_EN.html> accessed 1 September 2022.

Van Eijken and Rijpma consider that the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a serious threat to public policy given the exceptional and generalised threat to public health, but only at the outset of the pandemic and with a highly purposive interpretation.⁸¹

On the other hand, three arguments and the European Parliament's view⁸² comfort the opinion of academics refusing to consider public health as a ground under the Schengen Borders Code, such as Carrera and Luk. First, Title III of the Code on internal borders does not include public health as a reason for reintroducing internal border controls, nor do Recitals 24 and 25 of the preamble.⁸³ Carrera and Luk contend that Member States should not misuse the notions of public policy and internal security to derogate from the Schengen Borders Code.⁸⁴ Second, Article 8(2)(b) SBC includes public health in the justifications to reintroduce *external* border controls. The absence of explicit mention of public health in the provisions concerning internal border controls shows that the EU legislature did not intend public health to be a ground for the reintroduction of internal border controls contrarily to external border controls.⁸⁵ Third, the legislative history of the Code confirms this.⁸⁶ In a proposal for a predecessor regulation, the Commission included 'a threat to public health' among the grounds justifying the reintroduction of internal border controls.⁸⁷ However, the European Parliament deliberately deleted this ground, arguing that the reintroduction of internal border controls would not be the most appropriate and proportionate response in the event of a health crisis. Instead, the Member States should adopt

⁸¹ Van Eijken and Rijpma (n 8) 40–41. They argue that this way of interpreting the Schengen Borders Code shows its inadequateness. At first, they considered that the collapse of the public health system could have led to a breakdown of public order and hence threatened essential state functions. However, in the latter stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, they contend that the threat to public policy could no longer justify the internal border controls. *ibid.*

⁸² European Parliament, 'Resolution of 19 June 2020 on the situation in the Schengen area following the COVID-19 outbreak' (2020/2640(RSP)) para 7.

⁸³ Van Eijken and Rijpma argue that the absence of public health as a justifying ground in the Schengen Borders Code may explain why France did not solely rely on the spread of the virus in its first notification of the reintroduction of internal border controls. France also added 'the continuing threat of terrorism and the risk that terrorists would use the health situation to carry out attacks'. van Eijken and Rijpma (n 8) 40.

⁸⁴ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 57.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*; Montaldo (n 51) 414.

⁸⁶ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 57.

⁸⁷ Commission, 'Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing a Community Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders' COM (2004) 391 final, Article 20. This Article 20 is now Article 25 SBC.

health-related measures, such as quarantines.⁸⁸ The ECJ will presumably close the debate soon when it renders its judgment in the *NORDIC INFO* case.

3.2.1.2 *NORDIC INFO* will close the debate

As mentioned in the introduction, in February 2022, a Belgian court sent a preliminary reference to the ECJ, asking, among other things, ‘whether, in times of crisis, an infectious disease can be equated with a threat to public policy or internal security within the meaning of Articles 23(a) and 25 SBC, thus making the reintroduction of internal border controls [...] possible on that basis’.⁸⁹ Then, the Belgian court refers to the Commission’s Communication of 16 March 2020, which, in its opinion, does not expressly confirm that the Commission considers the pandemic to be a public policy reason justifying the reintroduction of internal border controls.⁹⁰ In its written submission, the applicant argues that the Schengen Borders Code does not include public health as a justification for the temporary reintroduction of border controls.⁹¹ On the contrary, the defendant considers that public health is an underlying objective of the Schengen Borders Code, and that the precautionary principle and the safeguarding of public policy and internal security can justify the measures taken.⁹² The arguments in this pending case mirror those in the current academic debate presented above.

Building upon the arguments mentioned above and following the traditional interpretation method of an EU law provision of the ECJ, ie the ‘text-context-objectives’ method,⁹³ these paragraphs present a likely outcome for the *NORDIC INFO* case. Regarding the wording, Article 25 SBC clearly establishes in which situations Member States may reintroduce internal border controls, namely where ‘there is a serious threat to public policy or internal security’. It does not include a ‘threat to public health’ among the circumstances allowing the temporary reintroduction

⁸⁸ MEP Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann declared that ‘[i]t is difficult to imagine that in such a case internal border controls should be reintroduced to undertake health checks of travellers (if “threat to public health” is the justification to reintroduce controls then that makes only sense if the controls focus on detecting such a threat)’. European Parliament, Amendment by Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann (MEP), Amendment 171. This point is mentioned by Carrera and Luk (n 43) 57, fn 258. However, it is nearly impossible to identify the exact document of the European Parliament.

⁸⁹ Case C-128/22: Summary of the request for a preliminary ruling (Working document, 23 February 2022) para 18.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, para 19.

⁹¹ *ibid*, para 7.

⁹² *ibid*, para 9.

⁹³ When asked to interpret EU law, the ECJ considers the wording, the context, and the objectives of the provision and the legislation of which it forms part. NW (n 11) para 56.

of internal border controls.⁹⁴ Then, as it concerns the context, there is no ambiguity either considering that the Code has never included a 'threat to public health' in its wording.⁹⁵ As regards the objectives, the procedure in Article 25 SBC constitutes an exception to the general principle ensuring the absence of control of persons when they cross internal borders and hence must be strictly interpreted.⁹⁶ The reintroduction of internal border controls on the basis of Article 25 SBC must thus be stringently limited to the situations mentioned explicitly in the article so as not to jeopardise the area without internal frontiers set in Article 3(2) TEU. Therefore, the ECJ is unlikely to agree with the defendant that public health as such is an underlying objective of the Schengen Borders Code. It will rather conclude that the scope of Article 25 SBC is limited to situations of serious threat to public policy and internal security. The three elements of the traditional interpretation method tally with the applicant's position.

However, the absence of mention of public health in the Code does not mean that the consequences of a public health emergency may not fall within the scope of public policy or internal security under exceptional circumstances and trigger the conditions set in Article 25. With this judgment, the ECJ should take the opportunity to clarify when a threat posed by a virus constitutes 'a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat affecting one of the fundamental interests of society',⁹⁷ meeting the threshold of a threat to public policy. The Court could note that, for example, at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the new virus constituted a threat to public policy due to the exceptional characteristics of the pandemic.⁹⁸ However, the ECJ has to determine whether the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2020, when the Belgian government took the disputed measure,⁹⁹ can be equated with a threat to public policy or internal security.¹⁰⁰ In July 2020, most Member States lifted their internal border controls reintroduced on the ground of 'coronavirus COVID-19'.¹⁰¹ The public policy and internal security of the Member States were not under threat due to the pandemic. Moreover, the epidemiological situation had

⁹⁴ The case before the ECJ only concerns the specific procedure under Article 25 SBC. Hence, this paragraph does not mention Article 28 SBC, which comprises the same circumstances to reintroduce internal border controls.

⁹⁵ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 57.

⁹⁶ SBC, Recital 27.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ This reasoning would be similar to the one mentioned in Van Eijken and Rijpma (n 10) 40–41 and Montaldo, (n 51) 415.

⁹⁹ Case C-128/22: Summary of the request for a preliminary ruling (Working document, 23 February 2022) paras 2–3.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, para 18.

¹⁰¹ Only Denmark (to the extent necessary), Norway, Hungary, Finland, and Lithuania had border controls in place in July 2020 for reasons of 'coronavirus COVID-19'. Commission, 'List of Member States' notifications' (1 September 2022) (n 8) notifications 163, 172, 198, 215–216, and 221–223). Other Member States, such as Austria, Germany and Sweden, also had border controls in place in July 2020 but for other reasons, including terrorist threats and secondary movement. *ibid.*, notifications 164, 175, and 181.

improved in Europe, including in Belgium, compared to March and April 2020.¹⁰² In the light of these considerations, the Court could hardly conclude that, when the Belgian government took the disputed measure, the COVID-19 pandemic still constituted a threat to public policy or internal security. However, this matter is ultimately for the referring court to determine.¹⁰³

In conclusion, the Court could answer that Article 25 SBC precludes the Member States from reintroducing internal border controls in situations of a serious threat to public health alone. However, Article 25 SBC does not preclude the Member States from reintroducing internal border controls when the threat caused by an infectious disease or a pandemic seriously affects one of the fundamental interests of society or the internal security of a Member State. If the Court follows this approach, it will uphold the legislature's will by firmly restricting recourse to Article 25 SBC to situations of serious threats to public policy and internal security and increase legal certainty as to the circumstances that may trigger the reintroduction of internal border controls.

3.2.2 *Second aspect: adequacy*

In second place, it is controversial whether the reintroduction of internal border controls adequately remedies the threat created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Except for the words 'adequately remedy' in Article 26, the Schengen Borders Code is silent about adequacy. This second aspect of proportionality is similar to the test of suitability of the general principle of proportionality. Subsection 3.2.2.2 assesses whether internal border controls were appropriate to limit the spread of the virus and distinguishes the first wave of contamination from subsequent waves. Before conducting this assessment, Subsection 3.2.2.1 explains the differences between border controls in the Schengen Borders Code and health screenings at the borders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2.2.1 Border controls vs health checks

Article 2(10) SBC defines border controls as 'the activity carried out at a border, [...] in response exclusively to an intention to cross or the act of crossing that border, regardless of any other consideration [...]'. This definition is quite broad and may encompass different activities depending on the type of threat requiring the reintroduction of internal border

¹⁰² For example, in the week of 8 to 14 July 2020, when the disputed measure was taken, there were on average 127.4 new cases every day in Belgium, while three months before, between 7 and 13 April 2020, there were on average 3,452 new cases per day. Sciensano, 'Belgium COVID-19 Epidemiological Situation' <<https://datastudio.google.com/embed/reporting/c14a5cfc-cab7-4812-848c-0369173148ab/page/ZwmOB>> accessed 2 December 2022.

¹⁰³ Usually, the ECJ clearly states that the application of the principle that it has established to the facts of the case is a matter to be determined by the referring court. See, for example, *NW* (n 11) para 82.

controls. The minimum verification consists of quickly checking the validity of the document authorising border crossing.¹⁰⁴

During the COVID-19 pandemic, internal border controls included identity checks, but also health checks, usually in the form of a temperature record.¹⁰⁵ Carrera and Luk consider that health checks conducted at the borders during the pandemic pursued a different objective than border controls.¹⁰⁶ The former aimed at ensuring that people crossing the border did not present symptoms of COVID-19,¹⁰⁷ while the latter intended to check that people crossing the border had the necessary documents to enter the country legally.¹⁰⁸ This change in the nature of controls put the border guards in the incongruous position of 'doctors'.¹⁰⁹ The Commission claimed that the organisation of these health checks does not require the formal introduction of border controls.¹¹⁰ Montaldo argues that it is more effective to perform these checks within the Member States' territory.¹¹¹ Yet, most Member States formally reintroduced internal border controls to conduct health checks and, at the same time, enforce entry bans or other restrictions on freedom of movement.

3.2.2.2 Different waves: from uncertain effectiveness to political message

Scientific uncertainty prevailed during the first wave of the pandemic.¹¹² Between late April and June 2020, at the peak of the reintroduction of internal border controls, eighteen Member States had reintroduced such measures mainly to enforce border closures,¹¹³ despite the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the World Health

¹⁰⁴ Bouveresse (n 20) 512.

¹⁰⁵ Ségolène Barbou des Places, 'Covid-19: le renforcement des contrôles aux frontières Schengen' (*Le Club des Juristes – Blog Coronavirus*, 12 May 2020) <<https://blog.leclubdes-juristes.com/covid-19-le-renforcement-des-contrôles-aux-frontières-schengen/>> accessed 1 September 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Carrera and Luk (n 51) 26.

¹⁰⁷ In its Guidelines of 16 March 2020, the Commission made clear that those infected by the coronavirus should not be refused entry, but rather have access to health care. COM (2020) 1753 final, para 19.

¹⁰⁸ Carrera and Luk (n 51) 26.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ COM (2020) 1753 final, para 20. The Commission did not clearly explain the difference between border controls and health checks at the borders in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The European Court of Auditors is worried that the Member States implement health checks which are de facto border controls without notifying the Commission. European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 56. Besides the absence of the notification obligation, health checks have no maximum duration. Heinikoski (n 49) 6.

¹¹¹ Montaldo (n 51) 415.

¹¹² Iris Goldner Lang, "Laws of Fear" in the EU: The Precautionary Principle and Public Health Restrictions to Free Movement of Persons in the Time of COVID-19' (2021) *European Journal of Risk Regulation* 1, 6.

¹¹³ Schade (n 9) 1.

Organization not supporting them.¹¹⁴ At this stage of the pandemic, the Member States enjoyed a high level of discretion considering the lack of reliable scientific knowledge.¹¹⁵ It was unknown whether the reintroduction of internal border controls was adequate to remedy the threat, but at least it showed citizens that their government was acting.¹¹⁶

In subsequent waves, fewer Member States reintroduced or prolonged internal border controls since it became more difficult for them to justify these measures.¹¹⁷ Indeed, scientific research has not demonstrated that the reintroduction of border controls effectively contributes to containing the spread of the virus.¹¹⁸ The Commission considers that these measures were unsuccessful and not the most efficient to address the threat resulting from the pandemic.¹¹⁹ Montaldo believes that border controls are not fit for purpose.¹²⁰ When border controls solely consist of verifying identity documents and checking some documents, they do not prevent a virus from crossing borders.¹²¹ Additionally, the virus was present in every Member State at that stage of the pandemic.¹²² Yet, some Member States still reintroduced border controls known to be ineffective and inadequate.¹²³ Guild notes a convergence between these Member States and those that had reintroduced internal border controls for migration and anti-terrorism reasons.¹²⁴ She concludes that these Member

¹¹⁴ Goldner Lang (n 112) 14. In February and May 2020, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control stated that '[a]vailable evidence [...] does not support recommending border closures which will cause significant secondary effects and societal and economic disruption in the EU'. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Guidelines for the use of non-pharmaceutical measures to delay and mitigate the impact of 2019-nCoV*, ECDC Technical Report, 2020) 8; European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Considerations for travel-related measures to reduce spread of COVID-19 in the EU/EEA* (ECDC Technical Report, 2020) 3.

¹¹⁵ Montaldo (n 51) 415.

¹¹⁶ The Member States actually reintroduced internal border controls well after the first infections in the EU. Stefan and Luk (n 19) 3.

¹¹⁷ Montaldo (n 51) 409; Thym and Bornemann (n 20) 1170. Gerkrath argues that the fact that some Member States, such as Germany, did not reintroduce internal border controls in the subsequent waves proves that that measure was ineffective and unnecessary. Gerkrath (n 54) 10. Nevertheless, one month after the publication of Gerkrath's article, Germany reintroduced internal border controls despite the earlier promise of not doing so. Schade (n 9).

¹¹⁸ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 48.

¹¹⁹ 'Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the 2021 Proposal' (n 20) 11 and 37.

¹²⁰ Montaldo (n 51) 418.

¹²¹ Gerkrath (n 54) 9.

¹²² For instance, during the second wave, which took place partly in November 2020 in Europe, every Member State reported new cases of infection with the new coronavirus. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 'Download Historical Data (to 14 December 2020) on the Daily Number of New Reported COVID-19 Cases and Deaths Worldwide' (ECDC, 14 December 2020) <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/download-todays-data-geographic-distribution-covid-19-cases-worldwide>> accessed 1 September 2022.

¹²³ Montaldo (n 51) 415.

¹²⁴ Guild (n 5) 403.

States consider border controls as a significant political solution to various crises.¹²⁵

Gerkrath and Heinikoski argue that the reintroduction of internal border controls was not intended to prevent the circulation of the virus. Rather, it was a way of showing the public that the authorities were acting.¹²⁶ The reintroduction of internal border controls was thus a political symbol rather than an effective epidemiological measure.¹²⁷ In addition to being ineffective, these controls are an aberration from a public health perspective. Indeed, border guards had contact with potentially infected people, and the controls led to the emergence of large gatherings, such as queues, at border crossing points. Both increased the risk of spreading the virus.¹²⁸ The reintroduction of internal border controls was thus a mere political measure not adequate to remedy the threat resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2.3 *Third aspect: duration of internal border controls*

In third place, the proportionality of the measures in relation to the threat resulting from the pandemic is debatable. The duration of the reintroduced internal border controls must be considered when assessing proportionality. This question of duration is included in the necessity test, which requires that the measure taken is the least restrictive. Keeping controls for long periods is certainly not the least restrictive measure. The following subsection gives more details about Member States' practices of prolonging their controls by switching legal bases. Then, Subsection 3.2.3.2 presents a judgment in which the Grand Chamber of the ECJ decided on the maximum duration of internal border controls reintroduced under Article 25 SBC.

Before turning to the Member States' practices and the ECJ case law, this paragraph shows that the Schengen Borders Code offers clear safeguards regarding necessity. Article 25(1) requires that '[t]he scope and duration of the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders shall not exceed what is strictly necessary to respond to the serious threat'. Moreover, Articles 25 and 28 limit the reintroduction of internal border controls to six months when the threat is foreseeable¹²⁹ and two months when it is unforeseeable.¹³⁰ These articles demonstrate that the reintroduction of border controls is supposed to be a temporary

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Gerkrath (n 54) 10; Heinikoski (n 49) 7.

¹²⁷ Montaldo (n 51) 417.

¹²⁸ Guild (n 5) 399; COM (2020) 1753 final, para 22. In its Guidelines, the Commission warned the Member States to prevent large gatherings when reintroducing internal border controls. However, in practice, long queues at border crossing points were frequent and were accentuated by border closures.

¹²⁹ SBC, Article 25(4).

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, Article 28(4).

measure of last resort,¹³¹ since it is a derogation to the general rule contained in Article 22 SBC.¹³²

3.2.3.1 Switching legal bases

It appears that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, similarly to during the migration and terrorism crises,¹³³ some Member States jumped from one legal basis to another to prolong the duration of their internal border controls beyond the legal limit.¹³⁴ For instance, France notified three times the Commission of the reintroduction of internal border controls for reasons of 'Coronavirus COVID-19' (in combination with the continuous terrorist threat and secondary movements) for the continuous period between 1 May 2021 and 31 October 2022,¹³⁵ and Norway nine times for the continuous period between 14 August 2020 and 7 October 2021.¹³⁶ These Member States' controls lasted well beyond the six months allowed, resulting in a 'partial de facto suspension of Schengen'.¹³⁷

¹³¹ *ibid.*, Articles 25(2) and 26.

¹³² 'Resolution of 19 June 2020' (n 82) para 5.

¹³³ These practices of switching legal basis to extend the duration of controls are not typical of the COVID-19 pandemic. They had already taken place during the two previous crises affecting the Schengen area. France, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and Norway kept their internal border controls for seven years, between 2015 and 2022, to deal with migration, terrorism, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Mariana Martins Pereira, 'Op-Ed: "The Court of Justice's ruling in the case of temporary reintroduction of internal border controls: to codify or not to codify? (Joined Cases C-368/20 and C-369/20)"' (*EU Law Live*, 24 May 2022) <<https://eulawlive.com/op-ed-the-court-of-justices-ruling-in-the-case-of-temporary-reintroduction-of-internal-border-controls-to-codify-or-not-to-codify-joined-cases-c-368-20-and-c-369-20-by/>> accessed 1 September 2022; Barbou des Places (n 105); Salomon and Rijpma (n 22) 6. For instance, Joined Cases C-368/20 and C-369/20 *NW v Landespolizeidirektion Steiermark* ECLI:EU:C:2022:298 concern the switch of legal bases during the migration crisis.

¹³⁴ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 48; Barbou des Places (n 105). However, most Member States reintroduced their border controls without switching legal bases to extend their duration. On 24 August 2020 (about six months after the first reintroduction of controls), only five Member States had their border controls still in place for reason of COVID-19: Denmark, Finland, France, Lithuania, and Norway. Carrera and Luk (n 43) 18).

¹³⁵ 'List of Member States' notifications' (n 8) notifications 288, 314 and 325. France is not the only Member State which switched legal bases to extend the duration of its controls as mentioned in n 133. However, it is the only Member State that kept its border controls for reasons of 'Coronavirus COVID-19' in spring 2022. Martins Pereira (n 133). Since the establishment of the Schengen area, France has been reluctant to remove border controls. Between 1999 and 2022, it was for only four years that France did not reintroduce temporary border controls. Gülzau (n 49) 13.

¹³⁶ 'List of Member States' notifications' (n 8) notifications 226, 231, 238, 243, 259, 274, 291, 302, and 313. Based on the duration of the controls notified, usually one month, it is likely that Norway relied on Article 28 SBC for seven of them, while France rather used Article 25 SBC and chose periods of six months. These examples show the diversity of Member States' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹³⁷ Salomon and Rijpma (n 22) 2.

The Schengen Borders Code does not allow these practices, even though it does not explicitly prohibit them.¹³⁸ Switching legal bases to continuously prolong border controls goes against the wording and the spirit of the Code.¹³⁹ The European Parliament is concerned about these practices of ‘artificially changing the legal basis for reintroduction to extend it beyond the maximum possible period in the same factual circumstances’ and made a call to stop them even during the previous crisis in 2018.¹⁴⁰ However, this injunction had little effect on the Member States’ practices, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴¹

3.2.3.2 Strict limits set in NW

In its recent judgment of 26 April 2022,¹⁴² the ECJ had the opportunity to rule for the first time on these practices of switching legal bases for artificially extending the duration of internal border controls.¹⁴³ The Grand Chamber of the ECJ agreed with the European Parliament and confirmed that the Member States may not reintroduce internal border controls based on Articles 25 and 27 SBC for a duration exceeding ‘the maximum total duration of six months,¹⁴⁴ set in Article 25(4) [when] no

¹³⁸ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 50.

¹³⁹ Salomon and Rijpmma (n 22) 2; Martins Pereira (n 133).

¹⁴⁰ European Parliament, ‘Resolution of 30 May 2018 on the annual report on the functioning of the Schengen area’ (2017/2256(INI)) para 10.

¹⁴¹ On 1 September 2022, only France was maintaining its controls for reasons of COVID-19, but the five other Member States familiar with the legal bases switch were maintaining their controls for other reasons. The legal basis switch no longer occurs for reasons of COVID-19, but these Member States continue to prolong their border controls beyond the time limits set in the Schengen Borders Code. ‘List of Member States’ notifications’ (n 8).

¹⁴² NW (n 11). This judgment concerns the reintroduction of internal border controls by Austria at its borders with Hungary and Slovenia during the migration crisis (para 26). The Austrian border controls reintroduced on the basis of Article 25 started on 11 November 2017 and were continuously prolonged at least until 13 November 2019 (paras 26–27).

¹⁴³ Martins Pereira (n 133). It is the first time that the ECJ rules on the long-standing internal border controls, although the practice is not new. In France, non-governmental organisations had unsuccessfully challenged the reintroduction of continuous border controls even in 2017 and 2019, before the NW judgment. However, in both instances, the French Council of State considered that Article 25 SBC does not prevent the reintroduction of border controls for a further period of up to six months in the event of a new or renewed threat to public order or internal security. It did not define these notions of ‘new or renewed threat’. In contrast to the Austrian court, the French Council of State did not refer to the ECJ. French Council of State, Decision No 415291 (28 December 2017) para 7; French Council of State, Decision No 425936 (16 October 2019) paras 6–7.

¹⁴⁴ The ECJ considers that the EU legislature regards a period of six months as sufficient for the Member States to adopt measures able to meet the serious threat to public policy or internal security, while maintaining freedom of movement after that six-month period. NW (n 11) para 77. A parallel can be drawn between this possibility to reintroduce internal border controls for up to six months and the institution of Roman dictatorship that lasted for a maximum of six months as well. During the Roman republic, men realised that additional powers in order to meet a threat should be limited in time. The EU legislature adopted a similar approach when deciding to limit the reintroduction of internal border controls under Article 25 SBC for up to six months. For further information on the institution of Roman dictatorship, see Oren Gross and Fionnuala Ni Aolain, *Law in Times of Crisis: Emergency Powers in Theory and Practice* (CUP 2006) 17–26.

new threat exists that would justify applying afresh the periods provided for in Article 25'.¹⁴⁵ The strict and clear wording of the maximum duration in the Code was decisive, as were the context and objectives of the provision.¹⁴⁶

The ECJ added that allowing the reintroduction of internal border controls on account of the same threat beyond six months would jeopardise the principle behind the creation of the Schengen area, namely the absence of internal border control.¹⁴⁷ The Court emphasised that the Member States must prove the existence of a new threat, but remained vague about what constitutes a new threat.¹⁴⁸ Thym fears that Member States would abuse this concept of a 'new threat' by invoking any new risk or discontinuing their controls for a few weeks before reintroducing them based on the same threat.¹⁴⁹ This fear materialised with the decision of the French Council of State of 27 July 2022.¹⁵⁰ The French Council of State considered a threat to be new 'either when it is of a different nature from previously identified threats, or when new circumstances and events change its characteristics in such a way as to alter its topicality, scope or consistency. Such circumstances and events may relate, in particular, to the subject of the threat, its scale or intensity, its location and its origin'.¹⁵¹ This definition is broad, and the French Council of State interpreted it accordingly. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it considered that the arrival of new dominant variants of COVID-19, which have a particularly high level of transmissibility and for which vaccines

¹⁴⁵ NW (n 11) para 94.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, paras 57–62.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, para 66. In his opinion in the NW case, AG Saugmandsgaard Øe held a different point of view. For him, 'where, on the expiry of the six-month period laid down in Article 25(4), a Member State is still faced with a serious threat to public policy or internal security, those provisions do not preclude, irrespective of the degree of similarity of the serious threat to the preceding serious threat, a fresh successive application of Article 25(1) of that code provided that all the criteria laid down by that code are satisfied, in particular that of proportionality'. Joined Cases C-368/20 and C-369/20 NW v Landespolizeidirektion Steiermark ECLI:EU:C:2021:821, Opinion of AG Saugmandsgaard Øe, para 75.

¹⁴⁸ NW (n 11) paras 79–81; Pola Cebulak and Marta Morvillo, 'Schengen Restored: The CJEU Sets Clear Limits to the Reintroduction of Internal Border Controls' (*Verfassungsblog*, 5 May 2022) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/schengen-restored/>> accessed 1 September 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel Thym, 'Op-Ed: "Illegality of Internal Border Controls: The Court of Justice feeds the Appetite for Legislative Reform: Landespolizeidirektion Steiermark (C-368/20 & C-369/20)"' (*EU Law Live*, 4 May 2022) <<https://eulawlive.com/op-ed-illegality-of-internal-border-controls-the-court-of-justice-feeds-the-appetite-for-legislative-reform-landespolizeidirektion-steiermark-c-368-20-c-369-20-by-daniel-thym/>> accessed 1 September 2022.

¹⁵⁰ French Council of State, Decision No 463850 (27 July 2022). In this decision, the French Council of State rejected the application of human rights associations to annul the French decision to extend border controls from 1 May 2022 to 31 October 2022 (introductory part and para 7).

¹⁵¹ Author's translation of French Council of State, Decision No 463850 (27 July 2022) para 5.

are less effective, constituted a new threat.¹⁵² The more a virus circulates, the more likely it is to have variants,¹⁵³ so it would be easy to meet the threshold of a 'new threat' in any pandemic situation, when by definition a virus circulates widely.¹⁵⁴ This national interpretation of a 'new threat' opens the door to abuses, as Thym feared, particularly in situations of large scale health emergencies.

Additionally, the ECJ clarified that the Member States could not rely on Article 72 TFEU to circumvent the strict time limit of six months.¹⁵⁵ The Court has been intransigent and thereby has protected the work of the EU legislature.¹⁵⁶ Due to the *erga omnes* effect of preliminary rulings, Austria is not the only Member State affected.¹⁵⁷ The judgment calls into question the practices of several Member States and would lead to the conclusion that the long-lasting internal border controls in the last decade have been illegal on numerous occasions.¹⁵⁸ It remains to be seen whether the Member States will comply with this recent judgment and refrain from using more than one legal basis to reintroduce internal border controls when a single threat persists. Subsection 4.2.3.2 below discusses the possible impact this judgment could have on the content of the 2021 proposal. Cebulak believes that the ECJ will probably develop a line of case law on the legality of the reintroduction of internal border controls.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² French Council of State, Decision No 463850 (27 July 2022) para 6.

¹⁵³ World Health Organization, 'COVID-19: Variants' <<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19/information/covid-19-variants>> accessed 2 December 2022.

¹⁵⁴ Merriam-Webster, 'Pandemic' <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pandemic>> accessed 2 December 2022. A pandemic is 'an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affects a significant proportion of the population'. *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ NW (n 11) para 90.

¹⁵⁶ Martins Pereira (n 133).

¹⁵⁷ Cebulak and Morvillo (n 148).

¹⁵⁸ Thym (n 149); Cebulak and Morvillo (n 148). In paragraph 82 of the NW judgment, the ECJ declared that it seems that Austria did not prove the existence of a new threat and thus prolonged its border controls beyond the maximum duration of six months. Then it adds that it will be for the referring court to decide. NW (n 11) para 82.

¹⁵⁹ Cebulak and Morvillo (n 148). On 1 September 2022, there were two pending cases on the interpretation of the Schengen Borders Code. None of them explicitly requires that the ECJ rules on long-lasting controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first case, *NORDIC INFO*, mentioned above, concerns Belgian measures. Based on the list of notifications received by the Commission, Belgium did not extend its border controls beyond the maximum duration during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second case, *ADDE and Others*, the French Council of State lodged a request for a preliminary ruling on 1 March 2022. Some human rights associations requested that the judiciary annul Decree No 2020-1734 of 16 December 2020, which establishes a regime for the refusal of entry of third-country nationals coming from another Schengen Member State to France in the event of the reintroduction of internal border control. Case C-143/22: Request for a preliminary ruling of 24 February 2022 (Working document, 1 March 2022). France is one of the six Member States which have continuously been keeping internal borders since 2015, as mentioned in n 133. When deciding on the *ADDE and Others* case, the ECJ might take the opportunity to rule on the legality of continuous border controls.

3.2.4 Fourth aspect: scrutiny over proportionality

In the Schengen Borders Code, two mechanisms ensure that the re-introduced internal border controls are proportionate. On the one hand, the Member States have three main obligations linked to proportionality.¹⁶⁰ First, they must assess the proportionality of the reintroduction of internal border controls and their prolongation under Article 26 SBC. Second, they must notify the Commission and the other Member States of certain information, such as the reasons and the scope of the reintroduction of internal border controls.¹⁶¹ When the threat is foreseeable, they must simultaneously submit the same information to the European Parliament and the Council.¹⁶² This notification duty must be read in combination with Article 31 SBC, which requires Member States to inform the European Parliament and the Council as soon as possible of any reasons triggering internal border controls. Third, under Article 33 SBC, they must present an ex-post report to the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission with certain information including an ex-post assessment of the proportionality of the reintroduced internal border controls.

On the other hand, the Commission has a supervisory role. It must request additional information if necessary¹⁶³ and issue an opinion if it has 'concerns as regards the necessity or proportionality' of internal border controls.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, the Commission has a reporting role: it must inform the European Parliament and the Council as soon as possible of any reasons triggering internal border controls¹⁶⁵ and present a report, at least annually, on the functioning of the Schengen area to the European Parliament and the Council.¹⁶⁶ Thus, the Schengen Borders Code provides clear rules on the proportionality assessment, notification and report duties of the Member States and the scrutiny and reporting roles of the Commission.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 50.

¹⁶¹ SBC, Article 27(1) when the threat is foreseeable and Article 28(2) when the threat is unforeseeable.

¹⁶² *ibid*, Article 27(2). When the threat is unforeseeable, Member States do not have such a duty. Instead, according to Article 28(5) SBC, the Commission must inform without delay the European Parliament of the notifications made under Article 28.

¹⁶³ *ibid*, Article 27(1).

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*, Articles 27(4), 28(3), and the second paragraph of Article 33. Article 27(4) SBC allows the Member States to issue an opinion when another Member State decides to reintroduce internal border controls.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*, Article 31.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*, third paragraph of Article 33.

¹⁶⁷ Moreover, Article 27(5) and (6) SBC provides the possibility to hold consultations, including joint meetings between the Member State planning to reintroduce controls, the Member States affected by the reintroduction of controls, and the Commission. These consultations, taking place at the latest ten days before the planned reintroduction, aim at arranging mutual cooperation between the Member States and examining the proportionality of the controls. This article does not focus on this mechanism.

Yet, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several Member States failed to comply with their duties related to proportionality, and the Commission did not address these failures. Indeed, the Member States' notifications did not provide sufficient information that the internal border controls had been reintroduced as last resort measures, as proportionate, and of limited duration.¹⁶⁸ The European Parliament has been worried about the lack of justification concerning respect for the principle of proportionality and the strictly limited period in the notifications.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, some ex-post reports did not contain sufficient information, while some Member States did not even send their ex-post reports.¹⁷⁰ Despite these Member States' failures, the Commission remained inactive: it did not request additional information or issue an opinion.¹⁷¹ The Commission's inaction has been criticised in the literature and by the European Parliament.¹⁷² The following subsection discusses further the Commission's passivity regarding its scrutiny role. It investigates why the Commission did not act under the Code. Then, the last subsection focuses on the infringement procedure, another tool available to the Commission to ensure that the Member States respect EU law, *inter alia*, when they reintroduce internal

¹⁶⁸ 'Resolution of 19 June 2020' (n 82) para 5. Only a limited number of notifications of the Member States included some considerations about the proportionality of the reintroduction of internal border controls. Carrera and Luk (n 43) 68. Some Member States have not, or only to a limited extent, assessed the necessity of temporarily reintroducing internal border controls. They did not show either that they were last resort measures. European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 37. For example, in its notification, the Czech Republic merely stated that '[i]n connection with the spread of COVID-19 caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, a serious threat to public order and internal security of the Czech Republic has been identified'. Carrera and Luk (n 43) 69.

¹⁶⁹ 'Resolution of 19 June 2020' (n 82) para 5.

¹⁷⁰ European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 40; 'Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the 2021 Proposal' (n 20) 141. The European Court of Auditors reviewed twelve ex-post reports of controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten of them did not contain a sufficiently detailed proportionality assessment and only three mentioned, very briefly, possible alternative measures. European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 41.

¹⁷¹ European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 38; Salomon and Rijpma (n 22) 6. By 1 September 2022, the Commission had not taken any step to enforce the rules of the Schengen Borders Code.

¹⁷² European Parliament, 'Resolution of 8 July 2021 on the Annual Report on the Functioning of the Schengen Area' (2019/2196(INI)) para 4; Gerkrath (n 54) 8.

border controls.¹⁷³

3.2.4.1 Soft law and opinions under the code

The Commission remained inactive regarding respect of proportionality during the COVID-19 pandemic and did not issue any opinion¹⁷⁴ despite its duty enshrined in the second paragraph of Article 27(4) SBC and the Joint Roadmap of 2020 stating that '[t]he Commission [would] continue to analyse the proportionality of measures taken by Member States [...] and [would] intervene to request the lifting of measures considered disproportionate [...]'.¹⁷⁵ Already in 2020, the European Parliament called on the Commission to make use of its prerogatives by requesting additional information from the Member States and adopting opinions when necessary.¹⁷⁶ In 2022, the European Court of Auditors also deplored that the Commission did not use its scrutiny powers and recommended that the EU institution ask for supplementary information when the notification or report lacks sufficient information and issue opinions when it has concerns as regards proportionality.¹⁷⁷ The Commission argued that requesting additional information in writing to Member States was not the most efficient measure considering the rapidly evolving context of the pandemic.¹⁷⁸ It preferred regular meetings with the 'COVID-19 Informa-

¹⁷³ The Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism is another tool that the Commission could use. Subsection 3.2.4.2 focuses on the infringement procedure rather than the Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism. Heinikoski argues that the Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism de facto replaces the infringement procedure as regards the monitoring of the Schengen Borders Code. The Regulation on the Schengen Evaluation Mechanism would be a *lex specialis*. Council of the European Union, 'Council Regulation (EU) No 1053/2013 of 7 October 2013 establishing an evaluation and monitoring mechanism to verify the application of the Schengen acquis and repealing the Decision of the Executive Committee of 16 September 1998 setting up a Standing Committee on the evaluation and implementation of Schengen' [2013] OJ L295/27; Heinikoski (n 49) 5. This intergovernmental enforcement mechanism evaluates annually the implementation of the Schengen acquis of some Member States, and it is not specific to the reintroduction of internal border controls. Moreover, the Commission itself acknowledges that it has shortcomings. Jonas Bornemann, 'The Commission's Proposed Reform of the Schengen Area: Stronger Enforcement or Conflict Aversion?' (*EU Law Enforcement*, 31 January 2022) <<https://eulawenforcement.com/?p=8157>> accessed 1 September 2022). In June 2021, the Commission proposed to revise this mechanism. COM (2021) 891 final 9.

¹⁷⁴ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 51; Gerkrath (n 54) 8; Montaldo (n 51) 423. Just as during the migration crisis, the legal framework provided a possibility to challenge the continuous border controls, but the Commission lacked political will to do so. Marie De Somer, 'Schengen: Quo Vadis?' (2020) 22 *European Journal of Migration and Law* 178, 185.

¹⁷⁵ European Commission and European Council, 'Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures' [2020] OJ C126/1, 14.

¹⁷⁶ 'Resolution of 19 June 2020' (n 82) para 13.

¹⁷⁷ European Court of Auditors (n 15) 38-39. The Commission accepted these recommendations. Commission, 'Replies of the European Commission to the European Court of Auditors' special report: Free movement in the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic: Limited scrutiny of internal border controls, and uncoordinated Member States' actions' (2022) 7.

¹⁷⁸ 'Replies of the European Commission' (n 177) 4.

tion group – Home affairs'.¹⁷⁹

Academics interpret the lack of a strong response by the Commission differently. Schade argues that the Commission was unlikely to adopt some strong measures during the COVID-19 pandemic since it did not react to the reintroduction of border controls following the migration crisis and merely holds an advisory role in the EU approach to the restrictions on freedom of movement.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, during the migration crisis, the Commission opted for soft law measures, such as dialogue with Member States and coordination. However, this approach was inconclusive since six Member States have been keeping internal border controls for more than six years.¹⁸¹ Wolff, Ripoll Servent and Piquet agree that the alignment of the reintroduction of internal border controls during the pandemic with previous initiatives explain the absence of contestation or debate.¹⁸² On the other hand, Bouveresse considers that the Commission did not issue any negative opinion as regards proportionality because it wished to react quickly rather than sanction Member States.¹⁸³ According to her, the adoption of soft law instruments by the Commission, such as communications and guidelines,¹⁸⁴ shows its pragmatism and search for efficiency.¹⁸⁵

The ECJ and AG Saugmandsgaard Øe seem to disagree with the Commission's approach to mainly issue guidelines and communications. In its *NW* judgment, the ECJ reminds the Commission of its duty to issue an opinion if it has concerns as regards proportionality or necessity under Article 27(4) SBC.¹⁸⁶ The ECJ criticises that the Commission did not issue any opinion about the Austrian long-lasting controls even though it considered that the controls were incompatible with the Schengen Borders Code and thus EU law.¹⁸⁷ It is likely that the ECJ will follow similar reasoning if it rules on long-lasting controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸⁸ In his opinion in the *NW* case, AG Saugmands-

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Schade (n 9) 8–9.

¹⁸¹ European Court of Auditors (n 15) paras 34 and 80. As mentioned in n 133, Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden have been keeping continuous border controls since 2015.

¹⁸² Wolff, Ripoll Servent and Piquet (n 53) 1129.

¹⁸³ Bouveresse (n 20) 519.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, Commission, 'Communication from the Commission: Towards a phased and coordinated approach for restoring freedom of movement and lifting internal border controls – COVID-19' COM (2020) 3250 final.

¹⁸⁵ Bouveresse (n 20) 519.

¹⁸⁶ *NW* (n 11) para 91.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*; Cebulak and Morvillo (n 148). The ECJ added that the lack of opinion by the Commission does not have any bearing on the interpretation of the Schengen Borders Code by the Court. *NW* (n 11) para 93).

¹⁸⁸ As mentioned in n 159, there was no pending case at the time of 1 September 2022 directly questioning long-lasting internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

gaard Øe found it regrettable that the Commission did 'not play the role entrusted to it by th[e Schengen Borders Code]'.¹⁸⁹

3.2.4.2 Infringement procedure

As the guardian of the Treaties, the Commission is responsible for monitoring compliance with EU law.¹⁹⁰ The Commission may launch an infringement procedure against a Member State.¹⁹¹ Under Article 258 TFEU, the Commission must deliver a reasoned opinion to a Member State that fails to fulfil an obligation under the Treaties.¹⁹² If a Member State does not comply, the Commission may refer the matter to the ECJ.¹⁹³ The Commission has not yet launched an infringement procedure related to internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic despite its concerns that they fail to comply with EU law.¹⁹⁴ Gerkrath believes that the Commission should have started infringement proceedings.¹⁹⁵ The European Court of Auditors also recommends that the Commission launch enforcement action in situations of long-term non-compliance with the Code.¹⁹⁶ Yet, the Commission did not accept this recommendation, arguing that it interferes with its discretion as regards its enforcement policy and whether or not to start an infringement procedure.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, the Commission considers that launching infringement procedures is not the most appropriate response considering the number of Member States concerned, the complex implications involved, and the negative effect it would have on trust between itself and the Member States.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹ Opinion of AG Saugmandsgaard Øe (n 147) para 73.

¹⁹⁰ TEU, Article 17(1).

¹⁹¹ In practice, the Commission first sends a letter of formal notice to the Member State concerned requesting additional information. The Member State usually has two months to send a detailed reply. If the Commission is not satisfied with the reply, it may officially start the infringement procedure by sending a reasoned opinion.

¹⁹² TFEU, first paragraph of Article 258.

¹⁹³ *ibid*, second paragraph of Article 258.

¹⁹⁴ European Court of Auditors (n 15) para 33. In 2020, the Commission announced that it would 'more systematically consider the launching of infringement procedures' where the Member States keep their internal border controls beyond what is necessary. Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum' COM (2020) 609 final 15. However, as of September 2022, it has not yet put its words into action.

¹⁹⁵ Gerkrath (n 54) 12.

¹⁹⁶ European Court of Auditors (n 15) 39.

¹⁹⁷ 'Replies of the European Commission to the European Court of Auditors' (n 177) 7.

¹⁹⁸ 'Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the 2021 Proposal' (n 20) 37. With regard to the long-lasting border controls reintroduced during the migration crisis, the Commission did not initiate an infringement procedure either, as this would have been counterproductive and increased the politicisation and emotionalisation of the situation, according to De Somer (De Somer (n 174) 185.

3.3 Conclusion: proportionate internal border controls during the COVID-19 pandemic?

As mentioned above in Section 3.1, when reintroducing internal border controls during the COVID-19 pandemic, most Member States first relied on Article 28 SBC, and then, after the first two months, used Article 25 SBC.¹⁹⁹ Section 3.2 showed that the articles in Chapter II of Title III of the Schengen Borders Code provide the following safeguards to ensure that proportionality is respected when Member States reintroduce internal border controls in situations of health emergencies.

First, the Schengen Borders Code provides two clear ‘legitimate objectives’ to pursue when reintroducing internal border controls, namely public policy and internal security. However, it remains silent regarding a threat to public health, which gave rise to a preliminary reference on the question in the *NORDIC INFO* case. Second, the Code requires that Member States assess the extent to which the reintroduction of internal border controls adequately remedies the identified threat. Yet, it does not provide many details about this requirement of suitability, which makes it the weakest of the examined safeguards. Third, the Code provides maximum durations for internal border controls, which can restart solely if a new threat arises, according to the ECJ in its *NW* judgment. It also requires that their duration does not exceed what is strictly necessary. Fourth, the Code contains some clear safeguards to ensure scrutiny over proportionality. On one hand, Member States must notify the Commission when they reintroduce and prolong internal border controls and send an ex-post report after lifting them. The notifications and reports must both contain an assessment of the proportionality of the measures. On the other hand, the Commission has the power to require additional information when it cannot evaluate the proportionality of the assessments and issue opinions when it has concerns regarding proportionality and necessity.

Section 3.2 above also demonstrated that the Member States disregarded these safeguards when they reintroduced internal border controls during the COVID-19 pandemic. They invoked a threat to public health, which is not included in the Code. They reintroduced internal border controls that are not adequate to remedy the threat arising from the pandemic. Some of their border controls lasted longer than the time limits provided in the Code and some switched legal bases. Moreover, the Member States sent incomplete notifications and reports with assessments lacking important information. The Commission did not use any of its prerogatives under the Schengen Borders Code: it did not request additional information or issue any opinion when this would have been necessary.

In conclusion, there are safeguards on paper for the four aspects of proportionality discussed. However, in practice, they are insufficiently

¹⁹⁹ Wolff, Ripoll Servent and Piquet (n 53) 1130.

respected or used. As a result, the internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic were disproportionate. The problem thus comes from the lack of political will of the Member States and the Commission to enforce the safeguards rather than from the content of the Schengen Borders Code.²⁰⁰

4 Proportionality and the 2021 Proposal to amend the Schengen Borders Code

4.1 2021 Proposal

Part 3 above has shown that, despite clear safeguards, four aspects of proportionality were problematic when the Member States reintroduced internal border controls during the COVID-19 pandemic. A discrepancy between law and practice is not desirable. The European Parliament shares this opinion and declared that the Schengen Borders Code is 'no longer fit for purpose and requires urgent and meaningful reform'.²⁰¹ To remedy the situation, on 14 December 2021, the Commission released a proposal to amend the Schengen Borders Code.²⁰² It is part of a broader framework intended to strengthen and increase the resilience of the Schengen area²⁰³ and could be the first major amendment to the Code.²⁰⁴ The proposal includes some provisions to amend the articles concerning the reintroduction of border controls at internal borders²⁰⁵ and external borders.²⁰⁶

The 2021 proposal is not the Commission's first attempt to amend the rules about the reintroduction of internal border controls. In 2017, following two years of significant increase in internal border controls for reasons of migration and terrorism, the Commission issued a proposal to amend solely the provisions dealing with the reintroduction of internal border controls, the '2017 proposal'.²⁰⁷ It provided for a significant extension of the maximum period for the reintroduction of internal border con-

²⁰⁰ Thym and Bornemann (n 20) 1169–1170.

²⁰¹ 'Resolution of 8 July 2021' (n 172) para 40.

²⁰² COM (2021) 891 final.

²⁰³ Council of the European Union, 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders – General approach' 2021/0428(COD) paras 1–2.

²⁰⁴ EU Law Live, 'New Regulation to Deal with Schengen Challenges Proposed by Commission' (*EU Law Live*, 15 December 2021) <<https://eulawlive-com.mu.idm.oclc.org/new-regulation-to-deal-with-schengen-challenges-proposed-by-commission/>> accessed 1 September 2022.

²⁰⁵ COM (2021) 891 final 5.

²⁰⁶ *ibid* 2–3. This article focuses on internal border controls, so it does not discuss amendments to rules on external borders.

²⁰⁷ Commission, 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 as regards the rules applicable to the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders (2017 Proposal)' COM (2017) 571 final 2.

trols: for instance, the time limit for persistent foreseeable threats would have been extended from six months to three years.²⁰⁸ The inclusion of better procedural safeguards, such as stricter reporting requirements and a mandatory Commission opinion after one year of controls, would have balanced these longer time limits.²⁰⁹ The EU co-legislature failed to agree on the 2017 proposal, so the Commission withdrew it in 2021.²¹⁰

The scope of the 2021 proposal is broader. It is based on discussions in connection with the previous 2017 proposal and the lessons drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic.²¹¹ Similarly, it has to go through the ordinary legislative procedure before amending the Schengen Borders Code.²¹² In that procedure, the Commission has the power of initiative, whereas the Council and the European Parliament decide jointly on its wording and adoption.²¹³ The position of the EU legislature thus constitutes a good indication of the future wording of the Schengen Borders Code. The Council has released its general approach about the 2021 proposal,²¹⁴ while the European Parliament is still in the reporting phase.²¹⁵ The relevant amendments of the 2021 proposal to Chapter II of Title III of the Schengen Borders Code can be classified into four categories.

First, as with the 2017 proposal, the Commission wishes to strengthen the procedural safeguards required when reintroducing unilateral internal border controls.²¹⁶ It clarifies and broadens the list of elements the Member States must assess when reintroducing internal border controls²¹⁷ and adds an obligation to conduct a risk assessment in the case of prolonged internal border controls in situations of foreseeable threats.²¹⁸

²⁰⁸ *ibid* 3–4, 7, and 15–17.

²⁰⁹ *ibid* 4, 7, and 15–17.

²¹⁰ COM (2021) 891 final 11. For further information about the legislative process of the 2017 proposal, see Anja Radjenovic, *Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control at Internal Borders* (*Legislative Train Schedule*, 20 August 2022) <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-temporary-reintroduction-of-border-control-at-internal-borders?sid=6101>> accessed 1 September 2022.

²¹¹ Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: A strategy towards a fully functioning and resilient Schengen Area’ COM (2021) 277 final 18. Montaldo argues that the way the Member States used the provisions of the Schengen Borders Code during the COVID-19 pandemic could influence the heated debates concerning the 2021 proposal. Montaldo (n 54) 525.

²¹² COM (2021) 891 final 23; ‘Procedure file 2021/0428(COD)’ (n 35).

²¹³ TFEU, Article 294.

²¹⁴ ‘2021 Proposal – General approach’ (n 203).

²¹⁵ On 31 March 2022, the European Parliament designated its rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs among the members of the LIBE committee. By 1 September 2022, no report about the 2021 proposal had been issued. ‘Procedure file 2021/0428(COD)’ (n 212). For further information about the legislative process concerning the 2021 proposal, see Dumbrava (n 32).

²¹⁶ COM (2021) 891 final 8.

²¹⁷ *ibid* 7.

²¹⁸ *ibid*, Article 27(2). This mandatory risk assessment was already included in the 2017 proposal and had found the general backing of the EU legislature (*ibid* 11).

Further, the proposal clarifies when the Commission could or should issue an opinion on the necessity and proportionality of internal border controls.²¹⁹ Second, it encourages the limitation of the impact of the measures on internal border regions.²²⁰ The Member States should take greater account of border regions when conducting their risk assessment.²²¹ Subsection 4.2.4 below analyses these changes when assessing whether the 2021 proposal would ensure that the Commission makes greater use of its scrutiny powers regarding proportionality and the Member States conduct stricter risk assessments.

Third, the Commission would like to encourage the use of alternative and proportionate measures.²²² The proposal clarifies when and how the Member States may introduce checks other than border controls in border areas.²²³ Fourth, the EU institution supports the creation of a new mechanism where the serious threat to public policy or internal security simultaneously affects a majority of Member States, putting the overall functioning of the area without internal border controls at risk.²²⁴ Subsection 4.2.2 below presents this contingency plan in detail and investigates whether police checks would remedy more adequately the threats caused by public health emergencies.

4.2 Four aspects of proportionality in the 2021 proposal

4.2.1 First aspect: type of threat

4.2.1.1 The new Article 25(1)(b)

In the proposal, the new Article 25 provides a general framework applicable to any kind of reintroduction of internal border controls.²²⁵ Paragraph 1(b) of this Article specifies that, among other things, 'large scale public health emergencies' can give rise to a serious threat to public

²¹⁹ *ibid* 7, 22 and Article 27a.

²²⁰ *ibid* 8.

²²¹ *ibid* 8 and 22.

²²² *ibid* 8.

²²³ *ibid*.

²²⁴ *ibid* 7 and Article 28.

²²⁵ *ibid* 21.

policy or internal security.²²⁶ This new provision would bring more legal certainty by making clear that the Member States have a legal basis to re-introduce internal border controls in situations similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If the proposed article is adopted as it stands with this explicit mention, it would close the debate mentioned above on whether public health is included in the concepts of public policy and internal security or is an acceptable ground under the Schengen Borders Code.²²⁷ The 2021 proposal is in line with the first position. The general approach of the Council also leans in that direction.²²⁸ The European Parliament had earlier called for 'clearer rules on public health emergencies',²²⁹ so it probably welcomes the inclusion of 'large scale public health emergencies' in Article 25(1)(b) of the proposal. De Bruycker considers that it is the 'minimum for the sake of clarity'.²³⁰ The Meijers Committee embraces this explicit introduction since it enhances legal certainty.²³¹ However, it wanted a 'clear and narrowly circumscribed definition' of 'large scale public health emergencies' to accompany this introduction.²³² In conclusion, as the 2021 proposal stands, it explicitly broadens the scope of situations where the Member States may reintroduce internal border controls and fails to provide a threshold that the threat must meet.

4.2.1.2 Public health not as a separate ground and *NORDIC INFO*

Bornemann and the Meijers Committee question the Commission's approach: why is public health included under public policy and internal security, and not a ground on its own?²³³ This interrogation is legitimate

²²⁶ Article 25(1) of the 2021 proposal mentions three other circumstances: '(a) activities relating to terrorism or organised crime; [...] (c) a situation characterised by large scale unauthorised movements of third-country nationals between the Member States, putting at risk the overall functioning of the area without internal border control; (d) large scale or high-profile international events, such as sporting, trade, or political events'. These four new situations encompass all the circumstances which have led to the reintroduction of internal border controls since the creation of the Schengen area. At the outset of the establishment of the Schengen area, the provisions about the reintroduction of internal border controls were used in the circumstances listed under d). Then, during the migration crisis in the mid-2010s, Member States invoked the activities under c). With the rise of terrorism in the EU, Member States relied on situations mentioned under a). Finally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the circumstances under b) arose. For further information about the circumstances leading to the reintroduction of internal border controls in the Schengen area between 1999 and 2020, see Gülzau (n 49).

²²⁷ For further information about the debate, see Subsection 3.2.1.1 above.

²²⁸ The Council did not suggest any modification to Article 25(1)(b) of the 2021 Proposal. '2021 Proposal – General approach' (n 203) 33).

²²⁹ 'Resolution of 8 July 2021' (n 172) para 40.

²³⁰ De Bruycker (n 50) 6.

²³¹ Meijers Committee, *Commentary on the Commission Proposal Amending the Schengen Borders Code (COM(2021) 891)* (Meijers Committee, 2022) 4.

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ Bornemann (n 173); *idem.*

because the 2021 proposal, contrarily to other texts of EU law, such as the Free Movement Directive,²³⁴ does not include the triptych of public order, public safety, and public health.²³⁵ Instead, public health falls under public order and internal security. The referring court in *NORDIC INFO* is also puzzled by the fact that one situation of public health would fall under public policy following the 2021 proposal, while it would constitute a separate ground of public health under the Free Movement Directive.²³⁶ Bornemann explains that the new Article 25(1)(b) replicates the interpretation that underpinned the Member States' practices during the early stages of the pandemic.²³⁷ The Meijers Committee believes that it is a way to provide a legal basis for the current and past reinstatements of internal border controls.²³⁸

Moreover, the ECJ judgment in the *NORDIC INFO* case could influence the wording of the new Article 25(1) depending on the date that it is rendered. If the ECJ first renders its judgment, the 2021 proposal would *de facto* have to consider it and perhaps change its wording. However, if the EU legislature adopts the 2021 proposal before and the ECJ decides to exclude public health from the grounds under the Code, it would be more problematic since the wording of the (newly) amended Schengen Borders Code would already not be in accordance with the case law. To avoid any discrepancy between the Schengen rules in the Code and case law, it would thus be preferable for the EU legislature to adopt the 2021 proposal after the Court has rendered its judgment in the *NORDIC INFO* case. Yet, this might delay the adoption of the 2021 proposal since the ECJ would only rule on the matter in 2023 or even 2024.²³⁹

4.2.2 Second aspect: adequacy

4.2.2.1 The new Article 28 mechanism

Article 28 of the proposal establishes a new mechanism that would safeguard the Schengen area where 'the same serious threat to public policy or internal security affects a majority of Member States, putting at risk the overall functioning of the area without internal border con-

²³⁴ For example, Article 1(c) of the Free Movement Directive (n 14) mentions the grounds of public policy, public security, and public health on an equal footing.

²³⁵ Gerkrath uses this concept of 'triptych' in Gerkrath (n 54) 10.

²³⁶ Case C-128/22: Summary of the request for a preliminary ruling (Working document, 23 February 2022) para 20.

²³⁷ Bornemann (n 173).

²³⁸ Meijers Committee (n 231) 4.

²³⁹ In 2021, the average duration of proceedings for references for preliminary rulings was 16.7 months. Court of Justice of the European Union, *Annual Report 2021: Judicial Activity* (Annual Report, 2022) 243. Following these statistics, the Court would decide on the *NORDIC INFO* case in around June/July 2023 since the Belgian court sent a reference for a preliminary ruling in February 2022.

trols'.²⁴⁰ Based on a proposal from the Commission, the Council would adopt an implementing decision authorising the reintroduction of internal border controls by the Member States.²⁴¹ This new mechanism could be applied in situations similar to the COVID-19 pandemic and is a clear response to that crisis. With its amendments to the 2021 proposal, the Council intends to lower the threshold set by the Commission to rely on that mechanism and give more powers to the Member States. For instance, according to the Council, the threat would have to affect only several Member States and not the majority of them, and the Member States would be competent to request the Commission to make a proposal to the Council.²⁴² Moreover, the Council does not want the Commission to suggest mitigating measures in its proposal or issue a recommendation about other measures to adopt.²⁴³

This mechanism would ensure that the reintroduction of internal border controls is more coordinated since it would replace any national measure in place.²⁴⁴ Nonetheless, this 'more Europeanised procedure'²⁴⁵ does not address the issue of the lack of adequacy of internal border controls to remedy the public health threat identified above. It is paradoxical that the Commission proposed a new mechanism applicable notably in situations similar to the COVID-19 pandemic when scientific evidence has shown that border controls did not help meet the threat arising from the pandemic. Indeed, the involvement of the Commission and the Council does not make border controls more adequate from an epidemiological point of view.

It is also questionable whether there was a need for a fourth mechanism considering that the Member States have been abusing the existing mechanisms and prolonged their controls for months, as shown in Subsection 3.2.3.1 above. It is even more controversial when one knows that controls reintroduced under the new Article 28 could last indefinitely. Indeed, the decision to reintroduce internal border controls would cover a period of up to six months and could be renewed for periods of the same duration as long as the threat persists.²⁴⁶ Therefore, this new Article 28 undermines the border-free area principle with such lax rules.

²⁴⁰ COM (2021) 891 final, Article 28(1).

²⁴¹ *ibid*, Article 28(1). This mechanism is similar to the one established in Article 29 for situations where exceptional circumstances put the overall functioning of the area without internal border control at risk. In both instances, the Council acts upon a proposal from the Commission. Bornemann (n 173).

²⁴² '2021 Proposal – General approach' (n 203) Article 28(1).

²⁴³ *ibid*, Articles 28(4) and (7). The power of the Commission to refer to any appropriate mitigating measures was an important element of this new mechanism. COM (2021) 891 final 7.

²⁴⁴ COM (2021) 891 final 22.

²⁴⁵ Bornemann (n 173).

²⁴⁶ COM (2021) 891 final, Article 28(2). The Council did not make any amendment to that paragraph, so it *de facto* agrees with the absence of a time limit. '2021 Proposal – General approach' (n 203) 40.

4.2.2.2 More adequate alternatives?

With its 2021 proposal, the Commission wishes to increase the use of alternative measures, in particular police checks, instead of internal border controls.²⁴⁷ This objective is not new: the Commission had already called on the Member States to give precedence to police checks in situations of a serious threat to internal security or public policy.²⁴⁸ Article 23 SBC explains that these checks cannot have border controls as their objective, must aim in particular to combat cross-border crime, cannot be equivalent to systematic checks at external borders, and must consist in spot checks.²⁴⁹ The 2021 proposal clarifies the type of checks authorised in border areas²⁵⁰ and requires that the Member States consider whether the use of alternative measures, such as checks, could be more appropriate when prolonging border controls.²⁵¹ Moreover, it states that the exercise of powers based on general information and experience of the authorities to contain the spread of an infectious disease with epidemic potential is not equivalent to the exercise of border checks.²⁵² Checking identity documents in border areas alone will not contribute to meeting a public health threat. Thus, establishing police checks does not help with the problem of lack of suitability in the event of a public health emergency. Moreover, it is unlikely that the Member States possess enough police officers to effectively check all concerned border areas²⁵³ and these checks are outside the scope of the Commission's supervision.²⁵⁴

Police checks are not the only alternatives to border controls. One option consists in taking measures related to health, such as mass screenings and testing, contact tracing, and quarantines. Health-related measures are more suitable in situations of public health emergencies. However, according to the Commission, health checks do not require

²⁴⁷ COM (2021) 891 final, 5 and 8.

²⁴⁸ Commission, 'Commission Recommendation (EU) 2017/820 of 12 May 2017 on proportionate police checks and police cooperation in the Schengen area' COM (2017) 3349 final, para 2; Ylva Johansson, '11. Situation in the Schengen area following the Covid-19 outbreak (debate)' (*European Parliament*, 18 June 2020) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-06-18-ITM-011_EN.html> accessed 1 September 2022. The Commission's encouragements to use police checks in border areas constitute a significant change from its original approach of strictly limiting their use. De Somer (n 174) 188. Montaldo explains this shift by the lack of effectiveness of the formal toolkit designed to preserve the internal dimension of Schengen. Montaldo (n 51) 428.

²⁴⁹ Article 23 is under Chapter I of Title III of the Schengen Borders Code, called 'Absence of border control at internal borders'. This position in the Code emphasises that police checks within the territory are not equivalent to border controls. The Treaty basis of police checks is Article 72 TFEU. Montaldo (n 51) 428. The ECJ further clarifies the concept of police checks in its case law (eg C-188/10 (Melki), C-278/12 (Adil), and C-444/17 (Arib)). Carrera and Luk (n 43) 51.

²⁵⁰ COM (2021) 891 final 21.

²⁵¹ *ibid*, Article 26(2).

²⁵² *ibid*, third indent of Article 23(a)(ii).

²⁵³ Carrera and Luk (n 43) 69.

²⁵⁴ Montaldo (n 51) 428.

the reintroduction of formal border controls,²⁵⁵ similarly to the other health-related measures mentioned and none of them are specifically border related. The Schengen Borders Code is thus not the appropriate instrument to include such alternatives.

Another option would be to consider epidemiological data when reintroducing border controls. Similarly to the traffic light system introduced for intra-EU mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic,²⁵⁶ controls could be allowed only between Member States or regions with different colours, meaning that their infection and positivity rates differ significantly. Involving the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) would give some legitimacy to the controls, especially since the ECDC would be involved at the external borders to determine whether there is a disease with epidemic potential in third countries in the 2021 proposal.²⁵⁷ Yet, reintroducing border controls based on epidemiological data in the Member States or advice by the ECDC does not make internal border controls more suitable if they are limited to checking identity and travel documents. In conclusion, this difficulty in finding appropriate measures related to border controls to meet the threats arising from public health emergencies might show that border controls are not suitable in such circumstances and that the Code should not be amended to include 'large scale public health emergencies'. In future pandemics, the Member States should rely on instruments other than the Schengen Borders Code to meet the threat.

4.2.3 *Third aspect: duration of internal border controls*

4.2.3.1 The new Articles 25a and 27a

Article 25a of the proposal contains the procedure applicable to unilateral reintroductions of internal border controls when the threats are foreseeable and unforeseeable and merges the procedures of the current Articles 25 and 28 SBC.²⁵⁸ This new article also changes the maximum duration of controls from two months to three months for unforeseeable threats and from six months to two years for unforeseeable threats.²⁵⁹ Thus, the 2021 proposal significantly extends the maximum duration of

²⁵⁵ COM (2020) 1753 final, para 20.

²⁵⁶ With its non-binding Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475, the Council established a colour-based 'traffic light' system to coordinate the restriction to cross-border mobility. The ECDC attributes a colour to the EU regions based on the epidemiological data of the regions (14-day cumulative COVID-19 case notification, test positivity, and testing rates). For example, the Council recommends that Member States should not restrict travel to regions classified as 'green'. Council of the European Union, 'Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 of 13 October 2020 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic' [2020] OJ L337/3, 6 ff.

²⁵⁷ COM (2021) 891 final, Article 21a(1).

²⁵⁸ *ibid* 21.

²⁵⁹ *ibid*, Article 25a(3) and (5); SBC, Articles 25(4) and 28(4).

internal border controls. The Council validated these new time limits in its general approach.²⁶⁰

Paragraph 5 of Article 27a goes even further and would allow controls to persist beyond these time limits in exceptional scenarios.²⁶¹ The Council is more moderate than the Commission. In its general approach, it tightened the conditions to rely on Article 27a(5): there must be a 'major exceptional situation in respect to a persisting threat', the notification must include a thorough risk assessment, and the Commission must issue a recommendation on the proportionality and necessity of the controls.²⁶² These extensions of the maximum durations suggest that the Commission yielded to some Member States' practices of keeping their border controls for months.²⁶³

Yet, the text is not likely to be adopted with these extended time limits for two reasons. First, the European Parliament will most probably refuse. During the negotiations on the 2017 proposal, the European Parliament refused to extend the maximum durations: it wanted to limit the period of the first reintroduction of border controls to six months instead of twelve, and the subsequent prolongation to an additional year instead of two.²⁶⁴ Additionally, it called for more stringent rules on the maximum duration of controls.²⁶⁵

Second, in its *NW* judgment, the ECJ held that the EU legislature considered that a period of six months was long enough when the Member States faced a foreseeable threat.²⁶⁶ If asked, the ECJ is unlikely to agree with the extension of maximum durations in the 2021 proposal and the possibility to prolong internal border controls beyond the maximum duration. It would certainly have preferred the proposal to include

²⁶⁰ '2021 Proposal – General approach' (n 203) 34 and 35.

²⁶¹ Article 27a(5) of the 2021 proposal reads as follows: '*Where a Member State considers that there are exceptional situations justifying the continued need for internal border controls in excess of the maximum period referred to in Article 25(5), it shall notify the Commission in accordance with Article 27(2). The new notification from the Member State shall substantiate the continued threat to public policy or internal security, taking into account the opinion of the Commission given pursuant to paragraph 3. The Commission shall issue a follow up opinion*' (emphasis added).

²⁶² '2021 Proposal – General approach' (n 203) 4-5 and Article 27a(5).

²⁶³ Bornemann (n 173).

²⁶⁴ European Parliament, 'Amendments adopted by the European Parliament on 29 November 2018 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 as regards the rules applicable to the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders (COM (2017)0571 — C8-0326/2017 — 2017/0245(COD))' [2020] OJ C363/385, Amendments 12 and 40.

²⁶⁵ Montaldo (n 54) 530. Among other things, the European Parliament wanted any prolongation of the controls beyond the initial six months to require a Council recommendation. 'Amendments adopted by the European Parliament on 29 November 2018' (n 264) Amendments 15 and 17.

²⁶⁶ *NW* (n 11) para 77. Martins Pereira argues that, in that paragraph, the ECJ implicitly held that internal border controls constitute inappropriate means in situations of persistent threats. Martins Pereira (n 133).

a 'sunset clause' that would prevent Member States from extending controls indefinitely.²⁶⁷

4.2.3.2 End of legal basis switch and more respect for necessity?

As mentioned above, some Member States used to switch legal bases to disproportionately extend the duration of their internal border controls beyond the limit set in the Schengen Borders Code.²⁶⁸ It is legitimate to wonder whether the 2021 proposal will put an end to these practices. Considering that the Commission has remained silent on the disproportionate controls in place since 2015,²⁶⁹ it is not surprising that the 2021 proposal does not include any clause prohibiting the switch between legal bases when the same threat persists. The Commission released its proposal before the ECJ rendered its *NW* judgment, which condemned these practices. In theory, the judgment would suffice, and there would be no need for an additional clause. In practice, this will depend on the level of compliance of the Member States. Furthermore, one can argue that the 2021 proposal would *de facto* end these practices. Indeed, it would extend the maximum time limits and even allow the prolongation of controls beyond them. In these circumstances, it would no longer be necessary to switch legal bases to keep border controls in place for months or even years.

During the COVID-19 pandemic (and the previous crises), Member States, six in particular, maintained internal border controls for months by switching legal bases.²⁷⁰ The approach of the Commission and the Council gives more flexibility to the Member States and the necessary resources to legally prolong their internal border controls for months and even years. Extending the maximum duration of internal border controls and allowing controls to persist beyond in exceptional scenarios do not improve the necessity of the controls. On the contrary, the requirement that the controls constitute the least restrictive measures would be more difficult to fulfil, leading more easily to disproportionate internal border controls. Nonetheless, the European Parliament is likely to suggest amendments to diminish the maximum duration and perhaps prohibit it from being exceeded.

²⁶⁷ Carrera and Chun Luk mention this notion of 'sunset clause' for the duration of internal border controls in *Love Thy Neighbour?* (n 51) 40.

²⁶⁸ For further information, see Subsection 3.2.3.1 above.

²⁶⁹ Meijers Committee (n 231) 2.

²⁷⁰ See n 133.

4.2.4 Fourth aspect: scrutiny over proportionality

4.2.4.1 Stricter and more frequent assessments

One way to improve scrutiny over proportionality is to require Member States to conduct stricter and more frequent assessments of proportionality. The 2021 proposal contains such rules. The new Article 26 would specify the content of the assessment depending on whether the Member States reintroduce for the first time or prolong, in situations of foreseeable threats, their internal border controls.²⁷¹ The list of elements to consider would differ between the two situations due to the Member States' incremental burden of proof.²⁷² It would include new elements, such as the impact on cross-border regions²⁷³ and mitigating measures.²⁷⁴ The new Article 27(1) would require the Member States to use a template for their notifications, which would improve the quality. In addition, according to the new Article 27(2), the Member States would have to submit a risk assessment when their controls have been in place for six months and when they wish to prolong them. Lastly, the Member States would also have to conduct a risk assessment when they want to extend their controls beyond the maximum period, ie three months or two years.²⁷⁵ The Meijers Committee welcomes these stricter reporting obligations on the Member States.²⁷⁶

The 2021 proposal also addresses the poor quality and lack of ex-post reports with the new Articles 33 and 27. The new Article 33(2) would require the Member States to submit an ex-post report every twelve months even if they have not lifted their controls for foreseeable threats and extend them beyond the maximum duration. Moreover, similarly to the notifications under the new Article 27, the Commission would have to adopt a uniform format for ex-post reports.²⁷⁷

In conclusion, the 2021 proposal would increase the scrutiny on the Member States' side by requiring more elements to be assessed in the risk assessments and more frequent risk assessments, using templates to

²⁷¹ COM (2021) 891 final, Article 26(1) concerns the first-time reintroduction, while Article 26(2) contains the rules for the prolongation of internal border controls when the threat is foreseeable.

²⁷² *ibid* 22. In 2021, the European Parliament recommended that additional safeguards and oversight measures should accompany each prolongation of border controls. 'Resolution of 8 July 2021' (n 172) para 40. The 2021 proposal requires that the Member States assess more elements when they decide to prolong their border controls. It thus meets this recommendation since it requires an assessment of additional elements in the event of prolongation. However, it does not make any distinction between further prolongations.

²⁷³ COM (2021) 891 final, Article 26(1)(b). The Meijers Committee welcomes the inclusion of the free movement of persons in cross-border regions. Meijers Committee (n 231) 4.

²⁷⁴ COM (2021) 891 final, Article 26(3).

²⁷⁵ *ibid*, Article 27a(5).

²⁷⁶ Meijers Committee (n 231) 4.

²⁷⁷ COM (2021) 891 final, Article 33(4).

harmonise notifications and ex-post reports sent to the Commission, and requesting more frequent ex-post reports. It seems that it would be more difficult for the Member States to ignore their scrutiny duties with these new rules that are more demanding. Hopefully, the Member States will comply more assiduously with these scrutiny requirements than they did during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2.4.2 More powers and obligations for the Commission

The second way to improve scrutiny over proportionality is to grant more powers to the Commission or impose additional monitoring obligations.²⁷⁸ Article 27a of the proposal clarifies when the Commission could or should issue an opinion on the necessity and proportionality of internal border controls and when consultations between the Commission and Member States should occur.²⁷⁹ Issuing an opinion would be optional,²⁸⁰ except for one situation: when border controls have been in place for a total of eighteen months – or twelve months, according to the Council.²⁸¹ Member States wishing to prolong border controls beyond the maximum period would have to consider this opinion, and the Commission would have to issue a follow-up opinion.²⁸²

In essence, the 2021 proposal adopts a different and more objective approach as regards the opinions. Under the Schengen Borders Code, the Commission must issue an opinion when it has doubts about the proportionality and necessity of the controls. The proposal rather mentions some situations where the Commission would have to issue an opinion, regardless of whether or not it has doubts. This change is desirable considering that the Commission did not use its prerogatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the Commission has the duty to issue an opinion in certain circumstances, it could not argue that it did not issue an opinion because it had no doubts as regards proportionality. The Meijers

²⁷⁸ The new Article 33(6) clarifies the elements that the Commission should include in its State of Schengen Report. The third paragraph of Article 33 SBC already requires the Commission to present, at least annually, a report on the functioning of the Schengen area without internal border control. However, the Commission has not issued such a report since 2015. In 2021, it announced that it would relaunch the adoption of the report. 'Replies of the European Commission to the European Court of Auditors' special report' (n 177) 5. This report concerns the reintroduction of internal border controls in general and is not specific to the proportionality of border controls, hence it is not mentioned in the body of the article.

²⁷⁹ COM (2021) 891 final 22.

²⁸⁰ For instance, opinions related to the ex-post assessments remain optional. *ibid.*, Article 33(5).

²⁸¹ *ibid.*, Article 27a(3). The Council wishes to reduce the time before which the Commission would have a duty to issue an opinion. '2021 Proposal – General approach' (n 203) 4 and 38.

²⁸² COM (2021) 891 final, Article 27a(5). As mentioned in n 272, the European Parliament recommended that additional safeguards and oversight measures should accompany each prolongation of border controls. 'Resolution of 8 July 2021' (n 172) para 40. The 2021 proposal requires the Commission to issue an opinion not for each prolongation but only after eighteen months. Therefore, it only meets partially the recommendation of the European Parliament. The institution would have certainly preferred that the Commission should issue an opinion for any prolongation of border controls.

Committee would prefer the Commission to issue opinions for every reinstatement of border controls and when relying on the new Article 28 mechanism.²⁸³ In conclusion, requiring the Commission to issue an opinion on the necessity and proportionality under certain determined circumstances would already be a good step towards more proportionality. However, as the Meijers Committee noted, the 2021 proposal could have gone further and extended the duty to issue opinions to other situations.

4.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The previous sections have shown that the 2021 proposal improves the aspects of legal certainty and scrutiny by including 'large scale public health emergencies' in the circumstances leading to a serious threat to public policy or internal security, requiring stricter and more frequent assessments from the Member States, and compelling the Commission to issue opinions as regards proportionality and necessity in certain circumstances. So far, the proposal does not satisfactorily address the aspects of adequacy and duration of the controls. It creates a new mechanism to reintroduce border controls and encourage the use of police checks, which are both not more adequate to meet the threat, and largely extends the maximum duration of controls, even allowing them to be exceeded. In conclusion, the 2021 proposal ensures that two of the four aspects of proportionality are respected when Member States would reintroduce internal border controls in situations of health emergencies. Consequently, in the event of a new pandemic, the Member States might reintroduce disproportionate internal border controls regarding their duration and adequacy.

The following paragraphs recommend some amendments to the 2021 proposal to increase the proportionality of controls in the event of a future pandemic. First, concerning the type of threat, if the new Article 25(1)(b) remains as it is, it would be necessary to add a definition, preferably in Article 2 SBC, of 'large scale public health emergencies' to avoid abuse, as the Meijers Committee suggested.²⁸⁴ This definition could be similar to the definition of 'threat to public health' in Article 2(21) SBC, which mentions disease with epidemic potential. This would bring greater legal certainty as to what constitutes such emergencies.

²⁸³ Meijers Committee (n 231) 4. The Council deleted the second situation mentioned in the new Article 28(7) when the Commission may issue a recommendation about less restrictive measures. It is thus unlikely that there will be an obligation to issue an opinion in that situation. '2021 Proposal – General approach' (n 203) 41. This recommendation from the Meijers Committee approaches a little the third option presented in the impact assessment accompanying the 2021 proposal, but not retained. The third option consisted in requiring the prior approval of one EU institution for the reintroduction of internal border controls (or removing the possibility to reintroduce internal border controls). The Meijers Committee's recommendation is not as strict since it would only require a Commission's opinion and not an EU institution's approval for each reintroduction of internal border controls (and does not call for the prohibition of border controls altogether). 'Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the 2021 Proposal' (n 20) 44–46.

²⁸⁴ Meijers Committee (n 231) 4.

Regarding adequacy, it seems complicated to render internal border controls adequate to meet a threat arising from a public health emergency. Police checks are not more adequate. Health-related measures, such as screenings and testing, are more appropriate, but they do not require the formal reintroduction of internal border controls and should thus not be regulated in the Schengen Borders Code. Consideration should therefore be given to removing 'large scale public health emergencies' from the grounds allowing the reintroduction of internal border controls in the new Article 25(1) since scientific evidence has shown that internal border controls are not adequate to remedy the serious threats arising from pandemics. However, if the legislature is determined to include these circumstances in the new Schengen Borders Code, it is crucial to define large scale public health emergencies, as mentioned above.

As regards duration, it is advisable to lower the maximum duration of controls, following the European Parliament's approach in the discussion about the 2017 proposal.²⁸⁵ Otherwise, longer time limits could encourage Member States to maintain their internal border controls for longer periods, even if they are no longer necessary. When balancing the interests at stake, the longer the controls last, the more they impact other interests, such as border-free travel and freedom of movement. Two months for unforeseeable threats in the new Article 25a(3) and twelve months for foreseeable threats in the new Article 25a(5) seem to strike a fair balance. Then, in order to avoid controls being reintroduced on the grounds of a single continued threat to last for months or even years, it is crucial to delete the new Article 27a(5), which allows the maximum periods to be exceeded. Furthermore, if the EU legislature reduces the maximum durations as recommended, it is necessary to add a clause forbidding Member States from switching legal bases as long as the same threat persists. This clause would enshrine in a legal text one of the findings of the *NW* judgment²⁸⁶ and could be phrased as 'Member States may not maintain internal border controls once the maximum total duration set in [the new] Article 25a(5) has elapsed and there is no new threat justifying an application afresh of the periods provided for in [the new] Article 25'.

In terms of scrutiny, dissociating the issue of opinions from the Commission's doubts is a good start. It would be even better to require the Commission to issue an opinion on necessity and proportionality for each reintroduction of internal border controls, as recommended by the Meijers Committee.²⁸⁷ It is important to include this duty in situations of foreseeable and unforeseeable threats. This would increase scrutiny over each reintroduction of internal border controls. Moreover, this would involve the Commission at the beginning of the reintroduction of internal border controls, which is not the case under the new Article 25a contrari-

²⁸⁵ 'Amendments adopted by the European Parliament' (n 264) Amendments 12 and 40.

²⁸⁶ *NW* (n 11) para 94.

²⁸⁷ Meijers Committee (n 231) 4.

ly to the mechanisms in the new Article 28 and Article 29, which start with its proposals. The Commission would not have to wait for the controls to be prolonged to issue an opinion as regards their proportionality and necessity as is currently the case under the 2021 proposal.

Lastly, the Schengen Borders Code should give more binding power to the opinions of the Commission to ensure that the Member States respect their duties related to proportionality and stop lacking political will to conduct proper assessments and lift their border controls as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of requiring the Member States to 'take into account' these opinions, the prolongation, or even reintroduction, of internal border controls could be dependent on a positive opinion of the Commission on necessity and proportionality. This approval requirement would only concern the proportionality aspect of the border controls. The Member States would have to conduct proper assessment of proportionality to receive a positive opinion. The new Article 25a could include a seventh paragraph which would read as follows: 'The reintroduction of internal border controls under paragraphs 1 and 4 is conditional upon a positive opinion of the Commission on their proportionality and necessity'. This alternative would provide a clear legal basis for the Commission to sanction Member States if they reintroduce or prolong internal border controls without a positive opinion on proportionality and necessity. Under the current Code, it is more difficult for the Commission to check whether Member States comply with their obligation since the latter only have to take account of its opinion, without necessarily having to follow it.

5 Conclusion

This article has investigated the extent to which the Schengen Borders Code and the 2021 proposal ensure that the Member States reintroduce proportionate internal border controls in situations of health emergencies. It has analysed four aspects related to proportionality to offer a broad analysis of the proportionality of internal border controls reintroduced in these circumstances: the kind of threat arising out of a pandemic, the adequacy of the reintroduction of internal border controls to remedy the situation, the duration of border controls, and the scrutiny over proportionality. As mentioned in Part 2, the first three aspects have been extracted from the wording of Article 26 SBC, which requires that Member States assess 'the extent to which [the reintroduction of internal border controls] is likely to adequately remedy the threat to public policy or internal security, and [...] the proportionality of the measure in relation to that threat'. The adequacy and duration of the controls are similar to the tests of the suitability and necessity of the general principle of proportionality. The fourth aspect about scrutiny is found in Articles 27, 28, and 33 SBC and is not a step of the general proportionality test.

Part 3 has shown that Chapter II of Title III of the Schengen Borders Code contains clear rules with strict safeguards on proportionality as regards the four aspects examined. The circumstances triggering the reintroduction of internal border controls, ie a serious threat to public policy or internal security, are clear, aside from the debate on whether these concepts include a serious threat to public health, and the Code explicitly mentions in Article 25(1) that the scope and duration of the controls should not go beyond what is strictly necessary. Moreover, the Code sets clear maximum durations for the controls, imposes notification, assessment, and ex-post report obligations on Member States and gives the Commission the power to request additional information and issue opinions as regards proportionality if necessary. However, despite these clear safeguards on proportionality, when Member States relied on Articles 25 and 28 SBC during the COVID-19 pandemic, some did not respect them, nor did the Commission enforce them. In practice, some Member States invoked a threat to public health without a legal basis, reintroduced border controls knowing that they were inadequate and for longer than the legal time limits, and sent incomplete notifications and reports to the Commission, which did not request additional information and issue opinions. The lack of political will to comply with the Schengen Borders Code during the COVID-19 pandemic was problematic.

Part 4 has focused on the 2021 proposal, which adapts the Schengen Border Code to the Member States' practices during the COVID-19 pandemic: it broadens the scope and lengthens the maximum duration of the exceptions to the general prohibition of internal border controls. The 2021 proposal improves two aspects of proportionality. First, it enhances legal certainty by including 'large scale public health emergencies' in the grounds for reintroducing internal border controls even though the forthcoming ECJ judgment in the *NORDIC INFO* case could bring some changes. Then, the 2021 proposal improves scrutiny over proportionality by requiring stricter and more frequent assessments of the Member States and mandatory opinions of the Commission in certain circumstances. This strengthening of scrutiny duties is a welcome move towards more respect for proportionality and less inaction by the Member States and the Commission. However, the 2021 proposal could have provided more safeguards as regards the aspects of adequacy and duration. The new Article 28 mechanism and police checks do not seem to be more adequate than existing border controls to meet health threats. The extension of the maximum durations of controls and the possibility to exceed them are not in line with the search for the least restrictive measures. Nevertheless, the legislative process of the 2021 proposal is still ongoing. The European Parliament has the opportunity to suggest amendments and improve the two remaining aspects.

Section 4.3 presented some recommendations to increase the proportionality of the controls that would be reintroduced following the 2021 proposal. First, adding a definition of 'large scale public health emergen-

cies' mentioned in the new Article 25(1)(b), inspired by the definition of 'threat to public health' in Article 2(21) SBC, would increase legal certainty. However, second, since it seems that the measures available in the Schengen Borders Code, ie border controls and police checks, are inadequate to remedy the threat arising from a public health emergency, 'large scale public health emergencies' should not be included in the grounds for reintroducing internal border controls. Third, reducing the time limits set in the 2021 proposal to two months for unforeseeable threats and twelve months for foreseeable threats and adding a clause prohibiting a legal basis switch if the same threat persists would contribute to limiting internal border controls to what is necessary. Fourth, the Commission should be required to issue an opinion for each reintroduction of internal border controls to enhance scrutiny also when Member States reintroduce controls and not only when they prolong them. Finally, the reintroduction of internal border controls should be conditional upon a positive opinion of the Commission on their proportionality and necessity to improve the quality of the proportionality assessment and ensure that the Member States respect the Commission's opinions.

In conclusion, if the current Schengen Borders Code had been correctly applied during the COVID-19 pandemic, it would have ensured that Member States reintroduce proportionate internal border controls as regards four aspects: the reason for reintroducing internal border controls, their duration, their adequacy, and their monitoring. However, this was not always the case during the pandemic. It seems that the Commission issued the 2021 proposal to give a legal basis to these internal border controls reintroduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This proposal, as currently formulated, would ensure that Member States reintroduce proportionate internal border controls in health emergencies, in particular with regard to the aspects of legality and scrutiny. Looking at the evolution of the reintroduction of internal border controls from the COVID-19 pandemic to the 2021 proposal, it can be seen that the content of the Schengen Borders Code will change considerably if the proposal is adopted in its current form, but Member States' practices will remain largely the same if they comply with the new rules.



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Maciej Bernatt (Cambridge University Press 2022, ISBN:
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Antitrust scholars have always wondered what makes competition law systems succeed and what makes them fail, or falter. Particularly interesting, and somewhat rare, are studies where insights are gained empirically, usually from interviews with key stakeholders. Maciej Bernatt's book, *Populism and Antitrust: The Illiberal Influence of Populist Government on the Competition Law System*, is one of the most recent contributions to the field of institutional antitrust, building on such empirical insights. One of the most prominent scholars of competition law in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Bernatt is Associate Professor at the University of Warsaw, and Director of the Centre for Antitrust and Regulatory Studies (CARS). He is also Editor-in-Chief of the Yearbook of Antitrust and Regulatory Studies (YARS), the leading CEE academic journal focused on competition law issues.

In the book, Bernatt uses empirical findings from Poland and Hungary to propose a new theoretical framework aimed at better measuring and understanding the illiberal influence of populism on competition law systems, addressing both challenges at the competition authority level and at the level of the judiciary. The book was published in 2022 by Cambridge University Press in their series on global competition law and economics policy, edited by Ioannis Lianos (University College London), Thomas Cheng (The University of Hong Kong), Simon Roberts (University of Johannesburg), Maarten Pieter Schinkel (Universiteit van Amsterdam), and Maurice Stucke (University of Tennessee).

The book, totalling some 270 pages, is structured in four parts. In the first, titled 'Background: populism, democracy, economy', Bernatt sets the scene by discussing the broader context and showing the implications populism has on democracy and the economy. The heart of the book is the second part, titled 'Populist influence on competition law systems', where he examines the influence of populism on competition law systems both by systematically discussing his empirical findings and by laying out his original theoretical framework. The third part, 'A regional system', is crucial for Bernatt's analysis of the actual (and potential) EU response to populist-related challenges to competition law development in Hungary and Poland. The fourth part gives the final diagnosis and prospects.

In the following paragraphs, I summarise and discuss the main insights and contributions, following closely the structure mentioned above.

In Part I, Bernatt is honest about acknowledging 'disagreement' over what constitutes populism. Establishing a link between populism and competition enforcement, he utilises this somewhat elusive notion to recognise it as a driver of illiberal change in the economy. However, unlike Rodrik for example,¹ Bernatt disagrees that economic and political populism should be considered as separate phenomena.

Developing his contextual narrative around the notion of economic patriotism, Bernatt describes the process of leaving behind the free market paradigm of the 1990s and 2000s for Poland and Hungary, the so-called 'privatisation reversal', and the advent of a more prominent role of the State in the economy. His discussion on economic patriotism and the idea of strengthening national champions is richly illustrated by instances of foreign firms being targeted by state policies leading to departures from Hungarian and Polish markets.

Equally, showing the detrimental effects of populism on democracy, Bernatt discusses the dismantling of checks and balances and the weakening of the rule of law. In particular, as regards Hungary, he unveils the critical repercussions of economic policies aimed at protecting national economic interests, such as limitations of procedural safeguards for private firms, the erosion of constitutionality review, and the rapid law-making process.

Bernatt's point of departure is the experience of Poland and Hungary in enforcing competition law in the 1990s and 2000s. The discussion does not address the pre-1990s influences or any enduring legacy of the planned economy and socialism on the economy and democracy.

In Part II, Bernatt examines the influence of populist governments on competition law systems at the national level. Relying on interviews with Hungarian and Polish stakeholders, he systematically describes the backsliding process and its repercussions. Bernatt argues that the 're-evaluation of economic principles' brought forward by economic patriotism, ie departure from the free market economic model, resulted in the weakening of the competition law system and in the capture of competition authority. He tells the story of populist governments' push to weaken the institutional resilience of competition authorities and bend competition rules to suit their economic agenda.

Against the backdrop of his empirical, country-specific insights, Bernatt proposes an original theoretical model to identify the 'manifestations' of populist competition law systems, postulating four hypothetical scenarios: deconstruction (competition system severely weakened), marginalisation (competition authority adopting an attitude of self-restraint), atrophy (gradual weakening), and limited impact. In his model, he uses two variables: first, the extent of the dismantling of checks and balances and the rule of law, and second, the extent of re-evaluation of the free

¹ Dani Rodrik, 'Populism and the Economics of Globalization' (2018) 1 *Journal of International Business Policy* 12.

market economic model. Bernatt's insights work finely to refine the line of research started by Kovacic and Lopez Galdos on competition system trajectories,² and Büthe and Aydin's research on the main factors influencing the development of those systems.³

Thereafter, in a most interesting and lively manner, Bernatt contextualises the abovementioned scenarios in light of actual developments in Hungary and Poland, discussing topics such as the independence of competition authorities, their operating capabilities, judicial review, and competition law enforcement. Among a host of insightful observations, I note here that Bernatt is wary of blurring the authority's mandate by expanding its competences, arguing that it runs the risk that its leaders may lack the incentives to prioritise the protection of competition. He also argues that legal reforms during populist rule weakened the independence of the courts adjudicating in competition law cases, resulting in a decrease in expertise. As regards the enforcement track record, Bernatt describes the enforcement slump in Hungary and Poland after the advent of populist governments. However, he stops short of claiming that enforcement in those two countries can be described as politically motivated, despite identifying cases that suggest either political motives behind enforcement or the competition authority's willingness to act in line with the ruling populists' political agenda.

His discussion of enforcement against state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the context of populist governments, as well as of statutory exemptions and limitations of enforcement powers illustrated by the Hungarian Watermelon case, is captivating. Bernatt claims that the authority's ability to enforce competition rules against SOEs can be considered a litmus test for establishing whether it is able to perform its role as an independent watchdog. Alarming is his reminiscing regarding Hungary, on the return to the pre-second world war approach of using cartelisation as a 'platform to regulate industries in line with national needs'.

In Part III, Bernatt brings a broader EU law context into play to analyse the reaction of the regional supranational economic system when faced with challenges brought about by populist governments in EU Member States. He is clearly concerned about the impact of the rule of populist governments on the system of competition law enforcement in the EU which is based on mutual trust, and advocates a direct reaction by the EU institutions rather than adopting new legislation. In particular, Bernatt is sceptical about the potential of the ECN+ Directive of bringing about real change in practice, as it, as he *inter alia* notes, fails to address the issue of the political character of the selection and appointment pro-

² William E Kovacic and Marianela Lopez-Galdos, 'Lifecycles of Competition Systems: Explaining Variation in the Implementation of New Regimes' (2016) 79 *Law and Contemporary Problems* 85.

³ Umut Aydin and Tim Büthe, 'Competition Law & Policy in Developing Countries: Explaining Variations in Outcomes; Exploring Possibilities and Limits' (2016) 79 *Law and Contemporary Problems* 1.

cess of the members of the authority's decision-making body, while also omitting to set precise guidelines related to the authority's resources and staff numbers. Interestingly, Bernatt warns that the directive's insistence on allowing competition authorities to reject complaints if they do not consider such complaints to be an enforcement priority may backfire in a country ruled by a populist government as it may serve as a convenient excuse for not opening politically sensitive cases, promoting, in fact, an authority's attitude of self-restraint.

Using the Hungarian Watermelons case to illustrate the (potential) role of EU law and EU institutions in addressing concerns related to the weakening of competition enforcement in 'illiberal democracies', as well as the limits of top-down intervention, he does not stop at criticising the Commission's narrow reaction only as regards this particular case.⁴ More generally, Bernatt warns that the lack of intervention by the Commission to defend the independence of the judiciary responsible for competition law may have unwanted consequences, with the national courts being less eager to refer preliminary questions concerning the interpretation of competition law, both national and EU.

Last but not least, I found the section providing a systematic analysis of the consequences of the rule of populist governments on the decentralised enforcement of EU competition law very insightful. The discussion found there, I think, is not only crucial from the point of view of illiberal democracies, but also as a point of reference for other CEE countries and the challenges they encounter when enforcing competition rules. It is also vital from the point of view of a possible reform of Regulation 1/2003. For example, Bernatt discusses the controversial (lack of) use of the effect on trade criterion by the CEE competition authorities. He warns that this potentially enables the use of national law to put forward populist policies which would not fit under EU competition law. Moreover, he cautions about the weaknesses in the notification system prescribed in Article 11(4) of Regulation 1/2003, ie the fact that competition authorities in Member States are not obliged to notify closure decisions. Arguing that this limits oversight by the Commission in cases where proceedings have been opened under Articles 101 and/or 102 TFEU, Bernatt rightly calls for reform of the notification system.⁵

In the final part of the book, in his diagnosis, Bernatt reverts to the issue of the interrelationship between populism, democracy, markets, and competition law as crucial for understanding the challenges he systematically examined in the previous pages. The logical loop he

⁴ For recent criticism over the Commission's stance in relation to limited rule of law in Hungary, see Kati Cseres, 'The Commission's Missed Opportunity to Reclaim Competition Law for the Rechtsstaat' (*Verfassungsblog*, 2022) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/the-commissions-missed-opportunity-to-reclaim-competition-law-for-the-rechtsstaat/>> accessed 19 December 2022.

⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Alexandr Svetlicinii, Maciej Bernatt and Marco Botta, 'The Dark Matter in EU Competition Law: Non-Infringement Decisions in the New EU Member States Before and After Tele2 Polska' (2018) 43 *European Law Review* 424.

hypothesises is the backbone of the book and a direct outcome of the foundational experiential study that helped inform his insights.

In short, Bernatt explains that populism affects democracy by bringing challenges related to the separation of powers, checks and balances, the rule of law, minority rights, media pluralism, etc. By weakening the rule of law and dismantling the system of checks and balances, populism weakens the competition law system. Furthermore, populism affects free markets by increasing the role of the state in the economy and by spurring economic patriotism, which signals that the perceived role of competition law may be changing. This affects the competition law system, eg competition authority may self-restrain its enforcement, offer only a lenient review of mergers, not play a significant advocacy role, etc. Markets may become excessively concentrated, the rent-seeking of private powerful groups becomes possible, markets can be monopolised as a result of anticompetitive regulations, and potentially anticompetitive actions of SOEs are not subject to competition authority scrutiny. As a result, markets may become less competitive and consumers may be harmed. This may further reinforce the rule of populist governments at the expense of individual economic freedoms.

In terms of solutions, Bernatt does not shy away from offering a number of suggestions. In terms of enhancing resilience, he argues that independence is critical for competition authorities' proper functioning. In this regard, he recommends a transparent merit-based appointment of authority leaders, requiring significant experience; clear rules against undue dismissals of authority heads to be laid down in the law; internal walls within the authority ensuring the protection of experienced and expert staff from the political context; and safeguarding budgetary autonomy. Not without controversy, Bernatt also proposes that the duration of the term of the authority's head and the members of the decision-making body should be limited in time and not subject to automatic renewal and that no more than two terms in office should be allowed. Moreover, to counter populism-inducing sentiments, he advances a proposal to implement a 'democratization of competition proceedings', including giving the right to comment to NGOs, research institutes, academia, and relevant state institutions, as well as to those believed to be directly affected by the alleged anticompetitive practice or notified concentration, or 'by the free market economy'. In addition, Bernatt notes the need for transparent and publicly available information on the cases 'not opened' by the competition authority. Overall, he argues, a culture needs to be built within which independent expert institutions, including market-regulatory ones, are respected.

Enforcement-wise, Bernatt suggests prioritising cases that involve harm to broader segments of society, in particular those in relative poverty and the lower middle class. He is keen on seeing competition law enforcement addressing inequality and economic insecurity that fuels populism but is, on the other hand, wary of expanding the goals of com-

petition law as this, he opines, can be used by populist governments to force the authority to sacrifice competition as a value worthy of protection and to clear transactions that raise significant competition concerns.

As regards the role of the EU and the EU competition law system, Bernatt argues for a more active reaction by the Commission, even if the developments only (nominally) concern national competition laws. He suggests that while cooperation between the competition authorities in the Member States and the Commission is relatively well developed in the field of practices restricting competition, building adequate channels of information exchange and monitoring vis-à-vis the control of concentrations at the national level is a must. In order to counter the attitude of self-restraint by competition authorities, the Commission should, he argues, open its own investigations in relation to anti-competitive practices materialising principally on the whole territory of the Member State.

This is a well-researched, thoughtful, and impassioned monograph analysing the interrelationship between populism and competition law in the broader political and economic context. While enriching the general literature on the evolution of competition law systems, it is a most welcome contribution to discussion on the role of competition institutions and competition policy in CEE. Anyone interested in learning about 'illiberal' influences impacting the performance of a competition law system, be it at the level of the competition authority or at the level of the judiciary, should be familiar with its main findings. May it inspire further (empirical) cross-country or country-specific studies so we can deepen our understanding of the ever-changing world.

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Book Review:
***The Politics of European Legal Research: Behind the Method*, Marija Bartl and Jessica C. Lawrence (eds)**
(Edward Elgar Publishing 2022, ISBN: 9781802201185)
288 pp, £100,00.

The first thing that strikes the reader of *The Politics of European Legal Research: Behind the Method* is the narrative of the structure. A mere glance at the contents page promises the reader that the discussion will be viewed through four perspectives: the politics of questions, the politics of answers, the politics of audiences, and the politics of the concept of law. Although the reader might be enticed by this grouping and expect an overarching chapter for each perspective, this expectation falls short. Nevertheless, the grouping of the discussion in the aforementioned four focal points and then delivering different perspectives under these focal points is a most welcome contribution to the recent method debates.

In the *Politics of Question*, Jessica C. Lawrence's chapter on 'Governmentality as reflexive method: excavating the politics of legal research' invites readers to find the politics behind their own methodological choices by exploring different ways in which legal research is impacted by pre-conceived framed narratives. Lyn K. L. Tjon Soei Len's chapter titled 'On politics and feminist legal method in legal academia' furthers the debate by engaging with struggles in using feminist methods in European legal research. Ruth Dukes' chapter on 'The politics of method in the field of labour law' highlights the political and normative impact of a shift in modern scholarship in conceptualising labour law from 'law of work' to 'labour market regulation'. Alessandra Arcuri's chapter on 'Boundary-work and dynamics of exclusion by law: international investment law as a case study' rounds up the *Politics of Questions* by exploring the exclusionary force of ideational boundary-setting.

In the *Politics of Answers*, Tommaso Pavone and Juan Mayoral's chapter on 'Statistics as if legality mattered: the two-front politics of empirical legal studies' provides a political history background of the rise of empirical studies. Julien Bois and Mark Dawson's chapter on 'Sociological institutionalism as a lens to study judicialization: a bridge between legal scholarship and political science' furthers the discussion by arguing that both traditional legal doctrinal and political science approaches to the study of European courts exclude important aspects of judicial practice in their analysis. Or Brook's chapter on 'Politics of coding: on systematic content analysis of legal text' argues that the dominance of the case-study method in legal practice and scholarship has created a tunnel vision of the legal world which does not adequately account for the messier day-to-day reality. Gareth Davies's chapter on 'Taming law: the risks of making doctrinal analysis the servant of empirical research' rounds

up the *Politics of Answers* by arguing that doctrinal scholars should not fall under the influence of empirical legal scholarship but remain true in their effort to theorise law in society.

In the *Politics of Audiences*, Irina Domurath's chapter on 'The politics of interdisciplinarity in law' introduces us to this perspective by asking which disciplines of law and lawyers have discussed interdisciplinarity in recent decades and how this choice of scientific debate has shaped the law itself. Marija Bartl and Candida Leone's chapter on 'The politics of legal education' explores the role of audiences in legal education. Joana Mendes's chapter on 'Comparative administrative law in the EU: the integration function and its limits' concludes the *Politics of Audiences* by exploring the role of comparative scholarship in the development of EU administrative law.

In the *Politics of the Concept of Law*, Christina Eckes's chapter on 'A timid defence of legal formalism' explores how questions of legal theory can also be arenas of political struggle, since they re-position law, legal scholarship or legal experts in relation to other groups, social problems or concerns. Poul F. Kjaer's chapter on 'How to study worlds: or why one should (not) care about methodology' furthers the debate by arguing that social sciences' method appeal as a tool for the study of social worlds has been undermined by its enhancement with positivist methodologies. Hans-W. Micklitz's chapter on 'The measuring of the law through EU politics' asks the question whether EU law today can qualify as law as we know it. Siniša Rodin's chapter on 'Telos of a method' rounds up the *Politics of the Concept of Law* by arguing from a relativist perspective that the neutrality of legal research can only be assessed from within the boundaries of a disciplinary tradition.

As the editors candidly disclose, this book is a product of the discussions and debates that occurred in 2018 and 2019. Therefore, it does not include the perspective on *politics of change* – a standpoint that could include recent shocks to the EU system, such as Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. However, and more importantly, this book does provide a critical and complex analysis – cushioned between four perspectives – that creates space for controversy and passionate debate among EU scholars. Moreover, this book offers students, lecturers and practitioners an insight into the colourful and complex world of politics behind how we understand and (ab)use law.

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EU Bibliography

Compiled by:

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Library of the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb¹*

Below you will find a list of bibliographic references to selected articles in the field of European law and policy.

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06 Single market – Competition

(Antitrust policy / State aids / Merger policy / Free movement of goods / Free movement of services / Freedom of establishment / Free movement of capital / Intellectual property / Company law / Tax issues / Free movement of people)

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07 Business – Industry – Trade

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09 Social policy – Social issues

(Social security / Social protection / Gender equality / Disability issues / Health / Drugs / Tobacco / Communicable diseases / The young / The family / The elderly)

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10 Economic and Social Cohesion – Structural policies – Regional policies

(Structural funds / European Regional Development Fund / European Social Fund / Community initiatives / Innovative actions / Cohesion Fund / Spatial planning)

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