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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW**

**(VENICE COMMISSION)**

**CONSTITUTIONAL LAW  
AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

**Appendix**

**Summary of the replies to the questionnaire**

**I. European integration and constitutional revision(s)**

1. *Is there a general or specific constitutional basis regarding the possibility of acceding to the European Union?*
2. *Did accession to the European Union require a constitutional revision?*
3. *Did the revision of treaties of primary law or the adoption of other acts require one or more constitutional revision(s)?*

**A. Overall basis in respect of international law and constitutional amendments in general****Belgium:**

Regarding accession to an international organisation, Article 34 of the Constitution states that:

“The exercise of given powers may be conferred by a treaty or by a law on institutions coming under international public law”.

**Denmark:**

Powers may be delegated to international authorities set up by mutual agreement with other states by a law adopted by a five-sixths majority of the Folketing or by a referendum called by the government if the majority required to pass an ordinary bill in the Folketing is obtained (1953).

**Greece:**

By means of a treaty or an agreement, certain powers established by the Constitution may be conferred on the institutions of international organisations. The law ratifying the treaty or agreement must be adopted by a 3/5 majority of the parliament.

**Italy:**

A provision of the constitution states that Italy agrees, on equal conditions with other states, to limitations of sovereignty necessary for a system to ensure peace and justice between Nations. Though this provision was adopted with a view to Italy's accession to the United Nations, the emphasis placed on limitations of sovereignty made it possible for Italy to join the European Communities and the European Union and ratify the amending treaties.

**Netherlands:**

The Constitution provides that legislative, executive and judicial powers may be conferred on international institutions by means of treaties. Under a provision introduced in 1953 with a view to the Netherlands' accession to the European Defence Community, any provisions of a treaty that conflict with the Constitution or give rise to conflicts with it must be approved by both Chambers of the States General by a 2/3 majority.

**Sweden:**

The Constitution provides that the government can enter into agreements with international organisations.

**B. Specific constitutional basis with respect to the European Communities or the European Union and specific constitutional amendments**

**Austria:**

A number of constitutional provisions have been amended or added to adapt Austrian legislation to the requirements of European Union law. The amendments are designed in particular to ensure that the various State bodies can take part in the Union's decision-making processes.

**Belgium:**

A constitutional amendment on the possibility of extending political rights to foreigners was made necessary by the adoption of the Treaty of Maastricht.

**Finland:**

Constitutional amendments were adopted to cater for Finland's accession to the European Economic Area and the European Union. They related in particular to the granting of powers in European matters to the parliament as, in principle, international relations are the responsibility of the president. Moreover, accession to the European Union was carried out according to a procedure similar to that applicable to constitutional amendments, the new provisions being referred to as "exceptions to the Constitution".

**France:**

A constitutional amendment was made to enable France to accede to the Treaty of Maastricht. It states that the Republic shall participate in the European Communities and the European Union. Furthermore, in accordance with the case-law of the Constitutional Court, transfers of sovereignty to the Communities – unlike limitations of sovereignty – have given rise to constitutional amendments (in respect of monetary union, the crossing of external borders and the right of European Union citizens to vote in and stand for municipal elections).

**Germany:**

The Constitution allows sovereign powers to be transferred with the consent of the Bundesrat. The establishment of the European Union as well as amendments to its statutory foundations and comparable regulations which amend or supplement the content of the Basic Law, or make such amendments or supplements possible, are subject to the procedure for amendments to the Basic Law (amendment introduced in anticipation of the ratification of the Treaty on European Union).

The constitutional provision in question was introduced on accession to the European Union. On the same occasion, specific amendments were introduced on the transfer of functions from the Bundesbank to the European Central Bank and the political rights of European Union citizens.

**Ireland:**

Successive constitutional amendments have been made to allow for accession to the European Communities, the ratification of the Single European Act and accession to the European Union. Moreover, the Constitution provides that no provision of the Constitution may invalidate national measures to implement European Union law.

**Portugal:**

Under a constitutional amendment adopted in 1982, all legal rules established by the competent bodies of international organisations of which Portugal is a member enter directly into force in domestic law if they derive from the constituting treaties concerned. In connection with the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht, a 1992 amendment provides for the possibility of jointly exercising powers necessary for the construction of the European Union. It also amended a number of constitutional provisions, in particular those relating to the right to vote and stand in elections.

**Spain:**

The Constitution provides that the conclusion of treaties, under which powers derived from the Constitution are transferred to an international organisation or institution, may be authorised by an implementing Act. This provision was adopted in anticipation of Spain's accession to the European Communities. The Constitution was also amended in respect of the right to vote and stand in municipal elections prior to ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht.

**Sweden:**

A specific provision deals with the possibility of transferring decision-making powers to the European Communities.

**II. European integration and the different powers**

1. *What is the participation of different State bodies in the law-making and decision-making processes of the European Union?*
  - a. *within European institutions?*
  - b. *in preliminary national procedure?*
2. *What is the participation of different State bodies (executive, legislative, judicial) in the implementation of European law?*
3. *To what extent has accession to the European Union influenced the balance of powers at national level?*

The executive bodies of all the member States play a major role in the law-making and decision-making processes of the European Union through their participation in the Council of the Union which tends to bolster their position compared to the other powers, particularly the legislature. Otherwise, the distribution of powers between the different State authorities in the implementation of European law is much the same as for domestic law.

Nonetheless, the following characteristics may be highlighted:

**Belgium:**

Proposals for Community law are submitted to the Federal Chambers and the Councils of the (linguistic) Communities and the Regions for their opinion. There is also a Committee on the European Union, which is made up of members of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate and Belgian members of the European Parliament and issues regular reports.

**Denmark:**

During preliminary national procedure, important questions are referred to the European Affairs Committee of the Folketing prior to government negotiations with the Union. The Committee approves the basis for negotiations submitted to it by the minister who will be representing Denmark in the Council.

**Finland:**

The government informs the Grand Committee of the parliament (and, in cases of matters concerning the Union's common foreign and security policy, the Foreign Affairs Committee) of all matters which would fall within the competence of the parliament were it not for the Union, and the progress made on these matters. The relevant committee may give its opinion.

**France:**

A constitutional provision pursuant to the Treaty of Maastricht requires the government to submit proposals for Community acts involving provisions of a legislative nature to the National Assembly and the Senate as soon as they have been conveyed to the Council of the Union.

**Germany:**

- The government informs the Bundestag and the Bundesrat about European affairs.
- The government must provide the Bundestag with an opportunity to comment on a draft legislative act before it is approved by the Federal Government in the Council of Ministers. The Bundestag's opinion must act as the basis of the government's position during negotiations. The Bundesrat's opinion also has to be taken into account on numerous occasions.

**Ireland:**

The parliament's Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and European Affairs Committee give consultative opinions on proposed European Union law; these are not binding.

**Italy:**

- The government must inform the parliament of the draft legislation and adopted laws of the European Union.

- Every six months, the government is required to present the parliament with a report on its approach to various European policies and its options concerning the programme of activities submitted by the member State currently chairing the Council of the Union.
- The parliament now has the role of guiding, advising and monitoring the government with regard to European policies.

#### **Netherlands:**

The Second Chamber of the States General has set up a Standing Parliamentary Committee for European Community Affairs which works in consultation with the government at the stage prior to decision-making by the European institutions.

#### **Portugal:**

It is the role of the Assembly of the Republic to express its opinion on matters being discussed within the European Union which have an effect on the scope of its legislative powers.

#### **Spain:**

A joint committee of the two chambers of parliament supervises government activity within the European Union, keeps track of the Union's legislative proposals and prepares opinions on the subject.

### **III. European integration and the different levels of State structure**

At the outset, it should be noted that the following are unitary states and so it is only their central governments which are directly involved in European affairs: Denmark, Finland (except for the province of Åland), France, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal (except the autonomous provinces of Madeira and the Azores), and Sweden.

Of course, the regional authorities of all the member States are represented on the Committee of the Regions. They may also have agencies in Brussels.

1. *Which of the powers transferred to the European Union were previously attributed to the central State [government] and which were attributed to infra-state entities?*

As stated in the contributions and in the report it is difficult to give an accurate reply to this question and therefore to include it in this summary.

2. *What are the respective roles of the central State [government] and the entities in the law-making and decision-making processes of the European Union?*
  - a. *within the institutions of the Union?*
  - b. *in preliminary national procedure?*
3. *What are the respective roles of the central State and the entities in the implementation of European law?*

**Austria:**

Cf. Internal distribution of powers.

**Belgium:**

- a. Conclusion of European Community treaties: These are joint treaties. All the interested parties (State, Communities, Regions) must enter into a co-operation agreement on the subject.
- b. Belgian participation in the Council of the European Union: Belgium is represented by the relevant authorities (on a rota basis for the Communities and Regions). Ongoing co-ordination is organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Germany:**

Generally speaking, central government acts at Union level. Exceptions may be made, particularly when it is the exclusive legislative powers of the *Länder* which are primarily at issue. If this is the case, a representative of the *Länder* appointed by the Bundesrat sits on the Council of the Union.

**Italy:**

Most European matters are the responsibility of the central government.

Nonetheless,

- the regions can have direct contacts with the European Union;
- in principle, the regions are empowered to implement Community rules in areas of regional jurisdiction.

**Spain:**

- Representatives of the autonomous communities may join some of the committees and working groups assisting the Commission;
- sector-based conferences enable the autonomous communities to participate in European Community affairs at national level;
- Community law is enforced by the body with responsibility in the area concerned, according to the distribution of powers at national level. This often implies co-operation between the State and the autonomous communities.

4. *On the basis of the replies to questions III.1 to III.3, can European integration be considered to strengthen the central State vis-à-vis the entities, or vice versa?*

**Austria:**

Central government powers tend to be strengthened.

**Belgium:**

A centralising influence: the power of the State to take measures on behalf of the Communities and the Regions.

A decentralising influence: the representation of the State at Community level.

**Germany:**

European integration mostly has a centralising influence even though the *Länder* have a role – albeit limited – in the European Union's decision-making processes.

**Italy:**

The centralising trend is particularly manifest in the fact that the central government is entitled to adopt uniform national legislation implementing Community law in an area of regional jurisdiction if it can invoke the need to protect general interests.

**Spain:**

There is a trend in both directions, but the crucial role of the State executive in the European Union decision-making process means that central government carries a special weight.

**IV. European integration and fundamental rights**

This section will cover cases in which European Union law has had a major impact on national law.

1. *Has the assertion of the four freedoms of the European internal market (free movement of goods, persons, services and capital) led to a modification, or an adaptation, of the principles applicable to the domestic internal market, in particular concerning economic freedom?*

**Belgium:**

Community law has directly influenced the legal definition of the Belgian internal market and hence the Belgian economic constitution. Legislation and case-law have established that Belgian economic union implies inter alia that the four freedoms guaranteed by Community law shall be respected.

**Greece:**

It is no longer required to be a Greek national in relation to invitations to tender.

**Ireland:**

The European Community Treaty has led to the opening up of a market which was formerly heavily protected.

**Italy:**

The rules of the European internal market radically altered the principles applicable in the Italian internal market.

**Portugal:**

The ideological principles of socialism have been removed from the economic constitution and the nationalised industries have been privatised.

**Spain:**

The assertion of the internal market has led to widespread liberalisation of the various economic sectors and given other members of the Union access to the Spanish national market putting an end to the former protectionist system.

*2.a. Has the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of nationality led to a modification of constitutional provisions or fundamental legislative provisions (in particular regarding access to real property)?*

**Austria**

There have been changes to the laws on property transactions.

**Belgium:**

Certain forms of discrimination in respect of access to civil service posts and registration fees for national training colleges and universities have been done away with.

**Denmark:**

The only major change relates to access to real property intended to serve as a permanent place of residence.

**Finland:**

In 1995, most of the provisions of the Finnish constitution on fundamental rights, which used to apply solely to Finnish nationals, were extended to everyone, regardless of nationality, under the influence of the European Convention on Human Rights and Community law. In particular, certain restrictions on access to real property and company shares were removed.

**Spain:**

All restrictions on foreign investments were removed. The law on the civil service was amended to remove restrictions on access which were contrary to Community law.

**Germany:**

The main changes relate to access to the civil service.

**Greece:**

The law was amended to enable European Union citizens to acquire real property in frontier regions.

**Ireland:**

The legislation under which the acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners was subject to official authorisation no longer applies to citizens of the European Union.

**Sweden:**

Newspaper ownership is no longer restricted to Swedish nationals.

- b. *Have Community rules on the equality of the sexes led to a modification of constitutional provisions or fundamental legislative provisions?*

**Belgium:**

The equality of the sexes has been established as a constitutional law by legislation, case-law and an interpretation of the Constitution in compliance with international and Community law.

**Finland:**

Community case-law on equality between women and men in the area of pension rights has had a major impact on national law.

**Ireland:**

The transposition of Community directives on equality of the sexes has made it necessary to adopt a number of national laws in the area.

**Netherlands:**

Some important statutory provisions, particularly relating to pensions, have been amended.

3. *Has the application of fundamental rights and general principles of law by the Court of Justice of the Communities exerted an influence at domestic level?*

**Germany:**

National law is interpreted in accordance with Community law. In its so-called “as-long-as” decision II (“*Solange II*”), the Constitutional Court decided that it would no longer rule on the constitutionality of secondary Community legislation, as long as the Court of the European Communities ensured a substantially similar protection of fundamental rights to that provided by the Basic Law.

**Spain:**

The Constitution expressly provides that the fundamental rights guaranteed therein should be interpreted in accordance with international law. In particular, the Constitutional Court has

interpreted these rights in accordance with Community law.

However, the influence of the case-law of the Court of Justice has been felt, particularly with regard to the general principles of Community law such as legitimate expectation.

4. *What influence has the adoption of provisions on European citizenship had on domestic law?*

**Belgium:**

The extension of the right to vote in local elections to citizens of other member States has given rise to a debate on whether this right should be extended to all foreigners.

**Finland:**

The minimum time of residence required of foreigners before they can vote in municipal elections no longer applies to European Union citizens.

**France:**

France has accepted the idea that European citizens form an intermediate category between French nationals and foreign nationals and that they have a privileged status compared to other foreigners, particularly with regard to political rights at local level.

**Germany:**

The main changes are in respect of the political rights of European Union citizens in municipal and European elections.

**Portugal:**

The Constitution has been amended making it possible, subject to reciprocity, for foreigners in general to vote in municipal elections and European Union citizens to vote in elections to the European Parliament.

**Spain:**

The only major change is that European Union citizens have been granted political rights.

**V. Relationship between Community law and domestic law**

1. *Have domestic bodies, in particular the courts, easily accepted:*

- a. *the immediate validity of Community law in the legal system of member States?*
- b. *direct applicability of Community law?*
- c. *the primacy of Community law over domestic law?*

**Belgium:**

The general recognition of the immediate validity of international law under the domestic legal system has meant that there has been no problem with the direct applicability of regulations and

even directives. The pre-eminence of Community law was also easily accepted, although there are still some doubts over the relationship between Community law and the Constitution.

**Denmark:**

The Danish authorities, including the courts, have accepted all the fundamental principles of Community law.

**Finland:**

The same applies as for Denmark.

**France:**

Legal doctrine now accepts the pre-eminence of Community law over domestic legislation, even retrospectively. However, the process has only been a gradual one: the *Conseil d'Etat* has now accepted the principle along with the Court of Cassation.

**Germany:**

The Constitutional Court accepts the immediate validity, the direct applicability and the pre-eminence of Community law. However, the Constitutional Court does consider it its right, in accordance with the aforementioned "*Solange II*" decision, to examine whether the European institutions have remained within the bounds of their sovereign rights. If not, then this may prompt it to enter into conflict with the Court of Justice of the Communities.

**Greece:**

These principles have been accepted without any reservations.

**Ireland:**

These principles are now expressly recognised following the constitutional amendments required by Ireland's accession to the Communities and the subsequent treaties.

**Italy:**

The Italian courts readily accepted these principles but it was only after long consideration that the Constitutional Court accepted that ordinary judges could rule that national law did not comply with a Community law. In addition, the Constitutional Court requires ordinary judges to apply national law in preference to Community law if the Community law in question violates the fundamental principles of the Italian Constitution or inalienable human rights.

**Netherlands:**

The answer is in the affirmative.

**Portugal:**

These principles have been acknowledged, particularly following the constitutional amendment of 1982. However, prevailing doctrine holds that constitutional law ranks higher than

Community law.

**Spain:**

These principles were readily accepted. Though the matter has never been decided in an actual case, the Constitutional Court does not regard itself as competent to rule on the constitutionality of secondary Community law whereas it may rule on primary law.

**Sweden:**

Under the law on accession to the European Union and according to subsequent practice, pre-eminence of Community law is acknowledged along with the other two principles.

2.
  - a. *According to domestic law, what is the place of classic international law (either conventions or customs) in the hierarchy of norms?*
  - b. *Is the relationship between Community law (primary law, secondary law, international treaties concluded by the Community) and domestic law treated differently from the relationship between classic international law and domestic law?*

**Austria:**

General international law and, allowing for exceptions, international convention law form part of domestic law. Depending on their content, the rules of convention law are treated as ordinary laws or constitutional laws.

Generally speaking, the relationship between Community law and domestic law is treated in the same way as that between international law and domestic law.

**Belgium:**

No major differences have emerged as yet but case-law does seem to be more prepared to assert the pre-eminence of Community law over the Constitution than vice-versa.

**Denmark:**

Denmark has a dualistic approach to the relations between international law and domestic law but recognises the direct effect and the pre-eminence of Community law. Hence, there is a major difference in the approach to the relationship between international law and domestic law on the one hand and Community law and domestic law on the other.

**Finland:**

The ratification of international treaties is authorised by the parliament at the same time as it adopts the law incorporating them into domestic law. Most frequently, this incorporation takes place at legislative level but it can be at constitutional level as has been the case with Community law. It is in this respect that Community law is treated differently from most other international treaties. Customary international law has the same status as customary domestic law.

**France:**

Under French law, international acts rank higher than domestic law but lower than the Constitution. Community law is not treated differently from any other international law.

**Germany:**

The general rules of international law form part of federal German law, ranking higher than normal legislation but lower than the Constitution. Once they have been approved, international treaties have the rank of statutory legislation. Community law, on the other hand, is treated as a separate legal order whose pre-eminence over domestic law is recognised although it is considered subordinate to the Constitution.

**Greece:**

General international law and treaties form an integral part of domestic law and are considered superior to the latter but subordinate to the Constitution. Community law is not treated fundamentally differently, though its immediate validity and direct applicability distinguish it from classic international law.

**Ireland:**

Ireland has a dualistic approach to the relationship between international law and domestic law. Community law has a special position because of the specific constitutional amendments adopted on accession to the Communities and amended in line with the changes to the founding treaties.

**Italy:**

While general international law ranks higher than domestic law according to the Italian constitution, the same does not apply to international treaties. These are incorporated into Italian law by ordinary laws which have no pre-eminence over other laws. It goes without saying that the status of Community law is different because its pre-eminence is acknowledged.

**Netherlands:**

The pre-eminence of international law is acknowledged in general terms in the Constitution. Accordingly, there is no difference in the relationship between domestic law and classic international law on the one hand and Community law on the other, except that the pre-eminence of Community law is founded on Community law itself and not on the Constitution.

**Portugal:**

International convention law ranks higher than domestic legislation but lower than the Constitution. The question of the pre-eminence of general international law over the Constitution is the subject of a doctrinal debate. Therefore the status of classic international law is not really any different from that of Community law under Portuguese law.

**Spain:**

The pre-eminence of international law over domestic law is acknowledged. Community law is not really treated any differently except that the Constitutional Court refuses to rule on the constitutionality of secondary Community law.

**Sweden:**

International treaties must be incorporated into Swedish law to be applicable in Sweden. Community law, on the other hand, has immediate legal force.