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Double Taxation within the European Union

Edited by
Alexander Rust

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Preface and Acknowledgment

With this contribution on double taxation within the European Union, the University of Luxembourg starts a book series which will deal with current topics of European and International Tax Law.

The chapters in the book constitute the extended versions of the oral contributions given at a conference on April 19, 2010 at the University of Luxembourg. Peter Wattel and Servaas van Thiel kindly agreed to write a comment on two chapters without having participated at the conference.

The book focuses on the problem of double taxation. Despite the conclusion of tax treaties and despite the enactment of several directives double taxation still occurs within the European Union. Double taxation causes severe obstacles for cross-border trade, for the provision of services and capital and for the free movement of persons. The first two chapters by Rust and Remacle/Nonnenkamp analyze the reasons for the existence of juridical and economic double taxation. Chapter three by Braum gives an overview of the problems of double burdens in criminal law and describes the solutions found in this area of law. Kube examines in Chapter 4 the constitutional limits for double taxation. Chapters 5 and 6 by Hofmann and Reimer respectively address the consequences resulting from the abolition of Article 293 EC which obliged the Member States—so far as it was necessary—to conclude tax treaties in order to abolish double taxation. Kofler and Rust ask in Chapters 7 and 8 the question whether double taxation can be solved within the European Union by the application of the four freedoms. Their proposals are criticized in Chapters 9 and 10 written by Wattel and Thiel. Pistone discusses in Chapter 11 whether the conclusion of a multilateral tax treaty or the introduction of the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base might constitute a solution for the problem of remaining double taxation. The last Chapter 12 by Ismer suggests using the arbitration clauses contained in the tax treaties to solve the remaining double taxation issues.

Preface and Acknowledgment

On December 10, 2010 the European Commission has published a communication outlining the most severe double taxation problems. The discussion on how to solve these issues has started. The authors hope to contribute to this fruitful discussion with the publication of this book and are hopeful that one day the problem of double taxation will be solved.

The editor would like to express his sincere gratitude to the authors. They traveled long distances by car or by train in order to participate at the conference as flights were cancelled due to the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull. They delivered their manuscripts within short notice after the conference. Many thanks are given to Kluwer especially to Lijntje Zandee for their cooperation and swift realization of this publication project. The editor wants to thank his assistant Katarina Köszeghy who edited all manuscripts. Above all the editor is extremely grateful to the advisory firm ATOZ who sponsored his chair and the conference series on European and International Tax Law.

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Chapter 1

Double Taxation*

*Alexander Rust***

1.1 DEFINITION OF AND REASONS FOR INTERNATIONAL JURIDICAL DOUBLE TAXATION

International juridical double taxation is in general defined as “the imposition of comparable taxes in two (or more) states on the same taxpayer in respect of the same subject matter and for identical periods.”¹ Juridical double taxation has to be distinguished from economic double taxation where two different persons are taxable in respect of the same income or capital.² The problem of economic double taxation is dealt with extensively by Remele & Nonnenkamp.³

International juridical double taxation may arise on three different occasions.⁴ The most common situation is where one state taxes a person on his worldwide income while the other state taxes the same person with regard to his income earned within the territory of the state. Worldwide taxation or unlimited tax liability is normally triggered by the residence of a person in a country; some

* This contribution serves as an introduction to all following topics. It examines the reasons for the existence of double taxation and analyzes the measures taken by governments and taxpayers to mitigate double taxation.

** Associate Prof. Dr. Alexander Rust, LL.M., University of Luxembourg.

1. OECD-Commentary Introduction para. 1 and Commentary to Art. 23A and B para. 1.

2. OECD-Commentary to Art. 23A and B para. 2.

3. See Ch. 2.

4. OECD-Commentary to Art. 23A and B para. 3.

countries, however, also tax their citizens on their worldwide income.⁵ This type of double taxation is labeled *worldwide versus source taxation*. Another type of double taxation arises if a person is taxed in two states on the basis of his worldwide income. This situation occurs if a person is a resident of two different states or if he is a national of one state and resident in another state. If both countries tax on the basis of nationality it may also arise in the case of dual nationality. This type of double taxation is labeled *worldwide versus worldwide taxation*. The third, in general less frequent type of double taxation arises if two countries regard the income as sourced within the territory of their countries. Both countries might define the source of income differently.⁶ These *source versus source* conflicts of double taxation are more frequent if permanent establishments are involved either as the recipient⁷ or as the payor⁸ of the income.

As a result, double taxation is mainly caused by the fact that countries extend the scope of application of their tax laws beyond the borders of their territory.⁹ However, double taxation would not even be avoided if all countries applied a territorial system as the notion of what constitutes “domestic income” varies from country to country.

1.2 MECHANISMS FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF DOUBLE TAXATION

Double taxation produces harmful effects on the exchange of goods and services and movements of capital, technology, and persons.¹⁰ In order to facilitate trade countries are willing to reduce their tax claims on a unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral basis.

-
5. For the U.S. see, e.g., the definition of a United States person in s. 7701(a)(39)(A) IRC. Concerning inheritance/estate tax, many countries tax their citizens on a worldwide basis for a certain period of time after emigration see Rust, in: Maisto, *Residence of Individuals under Tax Treaties and EC Law* (Amsterdam, IBFD, 2010), 85 et seq., and the national reports in the same book.
 6. In many instances the definition of domestic source is very broad leading to many overlaps, for example, see the definition of domestic source for income from personal services in s. 49(1) No. 4 lit. a German and Art. 156 No. 4 lit. b Luxembourg Income Tax Code: “Einkünfte aus nichtselbständiger Arbeit, die im Inland ausgeübt oder verwertet wird,” “les revenus d’une occupation salariée . . . lorsque l’occupation est mise en valeur au Grand Duché” which means that it is sufficient that the fruits of the activity are exploited in the source country.
 7. In general, the source state taxes the permanent establishment on its worldwide income, see, e.g., s. 49(1) No. 2 German ITC, the US uses the concept of “effectively connected with the conduct of a trade or business within the US” see ss. 871(b) and 882.
 8. See, e.g., the US branch profits tax on interest ss. 884(f), 861(1).
 9. Wassermeyer, in: Debatin and Wassermeyer, *Kommentar zu den Doppelbesteuerungsabkommen* (Looseleaf January 2008, München, Beck) Vor Art. 1, marg. note 5.
 10. OECD-Commentary Introduction para. 1.

1.2.1 UNILATERAL MECHANISMS FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF DOUBLE TAXATION

Customary international law does not forbid double taxation¹¹ but prevents states from taxing when there is no genuine link between the income and the taxing state.¹² This link can consist in a personal (residence or citizenship) or a territorial connection. In general, states do not go so far that they tax everything which would be possible under public international law; they do not tap their full potential. Many states do not tax on the basis of citizenship: a nonresident citizen will only be taxed if he earns domestic income. As a source state many states do not tax all income earned on their territory. They mostly impose a threshold and require a certain form of integration into the country. In general, nonresidents are only subject to limited tax liability if they earn items of income which are contained in a list of “domestic income” compiled by the source state.¹³ Source states generally abstain from taxing business income as long as the permanent establishment threshold has not been reached.¹⁴ Typically, by only taxing beyond a certain threshold countries are not foregoing an enormous amount of revenue. On the other hand they are facilitating trade by reducing the administrative burdens and avoiding double taxation. Sometimes states are unilaterally reducing source state taxation for residents of other states if the other state reciprocally reduces source state taxation for residents of the first state.¹⁵

The principle of worldwide taxation has many exceptions. As a residence state countries are generally willing to take the taxation in the source state into account either by allowing a credit for the foreign taxes paid, a deduction of the foreign taxes from the tax base, or by exempting foreign income.

The most common unilateral method for the avoidance of double taxation is the credit method. According to the credit method, the taxpayer may deduct the taxes paid in the source state from his tax liability in the residence state. The credit method is generally subject to two important limitations:¹⁶ First, the deduction is

11. BFH [1975] BStBl. II, 497 (498); Vogel, in: Vogel and Lehner, *Doppelbesteuerungsabkommen* (5th edn., Munich, 2008) Einleitung, marg. note 14.

12. BFH [1964] BStBl. III, 253 (256); BFH, BFHE 95, 345 (348 et seq.); Vogel, in: Vogel and Lehner, *Doppelbesteuerungsabkommen* (5th edn., Munich, 2008) Einleitung, marg. note 11.

13. See, e.g., s. 49 German EStG, Art. 156 Luxembourg LIR, ss. 861, 871, 881 et seq. US IRC.

14. See, e.g., s. 49(1) No. 2 lit. a German ITC, Art. 156 No. 1 lit. a Luxembourg ITC; for the US the threshold is an “effective connection with the conduct of a trade or business within the US” see s. 871(b) and s. 882(1) IRC.

15. See, e.g., s. 49(4) German ITC where non-resident shipping and air transport businesses are exempt from tax under condition of reciprocity.

16. Other requirements for receiving a credit are i.a. that the levy is a tax (not a voluntary payment) and that the foreign tax is structured in a similar way as the income tax in the residence state. See Doernberg, *International Taxation in a Nutshell* (8th edn., St. Paul, Thomson/West, 2009), 213; Aramini and Franzè, “Italy: Unilateral and Bilateral Reliefs from International Juridical Double Taxation on Income Derived by Residents” [2002] *Intertax*, 28 (30).

only granted for taxes levied on specific types of foreign income.¹⁷ Second, the credit granted for the foreign taxes may not exceed the domestic tax on the foreign income.¹⁸ This maximum creditable amount ensures that the credit method never reduces the tax on the domestic income.¹⁹ The credit method has the effect of reducing the effective overall rate of tax to the higher of the foreign or the domestic tax rate.²⁰ The neutrality concept achieved by the credit method is Capital Export Neutrality.²¹ The investor should pay the same overall tax irrespective of whether he invests at home or abroad.

Another way of mitigating the double tax burden is to allow the taxpayer to deduct the foreign taxes from the tax base. Foreign taxes are treated in the same way as business expenses. This method achieves national neutrality; the taxpayer will only invest abroad if his profit after foreign taxes is higher than the profit before taxes of a comparable domestic investment.²² Many countries permit the taxpayer to choose between credit and deduction method.²³ Generally, it is more beneficial to opt for the credit method as one Euro of foreign tax will reduce the domestic tax liability by one Euro. If the taxpayer opts instead for the deduction method one Euro of foreign taxes reduces the domestic tax liability only by the domestic tax rate times one Euro. That means it can be better to take the deduction instead of the credit if the total amount of credit allowed is less than the taxpayer's domestic rate times the creditable taxes paid.²⁴ Especially in a loss situation a deduction can be more favorable if the country does not allow carrying forward excess credits but allows carrying forward losses.

Sometimes countries unilaterally exempt foreign income. For example, Switzerland does not tax income from foreign permanent establishments or foreign immovable property;²⁵ many countries exempt foreign dividends;²⁶ the US is exempting foreign employment income up to a certain amount;²⁷ France is exempting all foreign income earned by corporations;²⁸ a few countries only tax domestic income.²⁹ But even a complete exemption of foreign income does not

17. For example, in Germany a credit is only granted for foreign taxes levied on income enumerated in s. 34d EStG; in Luxembourg on income enumerated in Art. 134bis LIR; in the US s. 862 IRC determines the scope of income from sources without the US.

18. See, e.g., s. 34c German EStG, Art. 134bis (1) Luxembourg LIR, s. 904(a) US IRC.

19. See Doernberg, *International Taxation in a Nutshell* (8th edn., St. Paul, Thomson/West, 2009), 242.

20. See Owens, *The Foreign Tax Credit* (Boston, 1961), 3.

21. See Vogel, in: Vogel and Lehner, *Doppelbesteuerungsabkommen* (5th edn., Munich, 2008) Einleitung, marg. note 25; Shaviro, *Decoding the U.S. Corporate Tax* (Washington 2009), 122.

22. Shaviro, *Decoding the U.S. Corporate Tax* (Washington 2009), 128.

23. For example, s. 34c(2) German EStG, ss. 27(a), 164(a)(3), 275(a)(4) and 901(a) US IRC.

24. See Owens, *The Foreign Tax Credit* (Boston, 1961), 17.

25. Article 6(1) Swiss Federal DBG.

26. See, e.g., s. 8b German KStG, Art. 166 Luxembourg LIR.

27. See s. 911 US IRC.

28. See Art. 209(1) French CGI: "... en tenant compte uniquement des bénéfices réalisés dans les entreprises exploitées en France..."

29. For example, Hongkong, Kenia, and Uruguay.