Studies In European Law

The Constitutional Foundations of European Contract Law A Comparative Analysis

Kathleen Gutman



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A Comparative Analysis

KATHLEEN GUTMAN





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This book is dedicated to the memory of my mother and father, Donna and Stanley Gutman

Foreword

Kathleen Gutman's book, which is based on her PhD thesis, is an impressive piece of academic work. As her PhD supervisor, I was a first-hand witness of her openness towards different ideas and critical comments, her perseverance in constructing a convincing argument, and the enormous amount of research and analytical thinking that she put into it.

This book contains a detailed and cohesive assessment of the constitutional foundations of European contract law. It is not, however, limited to examining the vertical allocation of powers between the EU and its Member States in the field of contract law. As she herself explains, the exercise of powers at EU level 'is not the only element in the debate about European contract law, but it is an important one that permeates the others'. Accordingly, the book also looks at alternative and complementary routes to the adoption of instruments that aim to achieve a degree of convergence between the contract laws of the Member States. This shows that the development of European contract law has not only a 'top-down' dimension in accordance with the EU constitutional principles of conferral, subsidiarity and proportionality, but may also be the result of a 'bottom-up' approach.

In addition, the book is enriched by Kathleen Gutman's expertise in US law. As a secondary research focus, the book embarks on a very interesting comparative study with regard to the constitutional dimensions of contract law on both sides of the Atlantic. Throughout her meticulous analysis, the author draws important lessons from the US experience on issues such as the federalization of contract law, federal common law, the uniform law process and the Uniform Commercial Code.

Like all great classics, this book is divided into three parts. Part I defines the context in which the debate about European contract law should, in the author's view, take place. At the outset, she brings to the reader's attention the fact that there are no universal definitions of key concepts such as 'contract law' and 'private law'. Accordingly, by defining those key concepts, the author stresses the importance of semantic clarification as the pre-condition for a productive discussion. Next, she moves on to examine the EU legislative instruments that constitute the 'hard core' of the EU contract law acquis, and the way in which the ECJ has interpreted them. Written with an audience unfamiliar with the American contract law framework in mind, this Part of the book also comprises a concise account of the way in which the constitutional dimensions of contract law have developed in the US.

In Part II, the book sets out, in a chronological order, the main events that have given rise to the debate about European contract law. It looks, for example, at the influence of the Commission's three seminal Communications on European contract law, as well as at the reasons that triggered the adoption of the Consumer Rights Directive. This part of the book seeks to determine, in particular, whether the constitutionality of European contract law has ever been considered, either implicitly or explicitly, at European level.

Once the contours of the debate about European contract law have been drawn, Part III begins by examining whether the EU has power to act in the field of contract law. To that end, the author explores whether and, if so, to what extent Articles 81, 114, 115, 169, 352 TFEU may operate as appropriate legal bases for the adoption of a European contract law instrument. In so doing, she examines the problems connected with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality that the EU legislator

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may encounter. The absence of legislative competence at EU level does not, however, put an end to the Europeanization of contract law. For example, by looking at the US experience, the strengths and weaknesses of softer policy-making techniques, such as the Open Method Coordination (OMC), are also examined.

Finally, the concluding chapter of the book supports the contention that Article 114 TFEU and, as the case may be, Article 352 TFEU constitute a proper legal basis for the adoption of a European contract law instrument. Whilst Articles 81, 115, and 169 TFEU may not secure compliance with the principle of conferral, they have, nonetheless, an indirect role in highlighting the viability of the EU's internal market competence under Article 114 TFEU. As to the OMC, she notes that, because of its limitations, it may only serve as a complementary route for pursuing the European contract law project.

Written in a clear and entertaining style, this book succeeds in providing a solid analytical basis for future debates about European contract law. It is a thoughtful and rigorous study that addresses a challenging set of questions for lawyers, scholars and students in both Europe and the US. Overall, the book written by Kathleen Gutman is an excellent contribution to the literature on European Union law and I warmly congratulate her.

Prof. Dr. Koen Lenaerts Vice-President of the Court of Justice of the European Union

Series Editors' Preface

The European Union has adopted a range of measures in the field of private and contract law, and a debate on the desirability and feasibility of harmonizing European contract law has been active for some years now. Kathleen Gutman's book makes an informative and important contribution to this debate by focusing not just on the movement to unify or harmonize European private law, but specifically on the question of the legal and constitutional basis for EU contract law.

Noting that the political and legal debate on the unification of European private law has proceeded apace with surprisingly little attention being given to the underlying question of the nature and scope of the EU's competence to take action in this field, the author sets out to remedy that deficit in this book. The chapters in the first part of the book address both abstract and concrete aspects of the topic, from a survey of different models of approximation of contract law, to an examination of some of the major pieces of EU contract legislation such as the Doorstep Selling Directive, the Consumer Credit Directive, the Commercial Agents Directive and the Unfair Contract Terms Directive, and to an analysis of the approach of the EU Court of Justice.

These EU-focused chapters are followed by an interesting and instructive comparison with the experience of the United States in which contract law has been treated as remaining largely within the purview of states, with federal intervention coming largely in the form of restatements, uniform and model laws, and the Uniform Commercial Code. Analysing the various instruments and approaches adopted in the US context, the author warns against any easy assumption about the success of the US approach to the question of a uniform American contract law or its applicability to the EU context, and points to the range of tensions and debates which continue in the United States today.

In the second part of the book, Gutman presents the evolution of the debate which has taken place in Europe since the earliest days of European integration on the feasibility and desirability of harmonizing private law, and surveys the various academic and institutional contributions to this debate. She traces the debate across the decades, leading to the emergence of the Common Frame of Reference and numerous initiatives which followed it, and giving particular attention to the influential interventions of the Commission in the debate.

The final chapters of the book are devoted to an examination of what Gutman calls the constitutionality of the adoption of EU measures in the field of contract law – including their possible legal basis in provisions of the Treaties dealing with the internal market, consumer law and civil justice – as well as their compliance with principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and sincere cooperation. She concludes by arguing that the EU enjoys sufficient competence to adopt an appropriate European contract law instrument under the internal market provisions of the Treaty, perhaps in conjunction with the residual powers clause, and alongside various alternative and complementary routes such as the Open Method of Coordination.

This is a very clearly written, meticulous, and comprehensive work on an important subject of considerable contemporary interest in EU and private law. It should be of considerable interest to scholars and students of European integration and to contract and private lawyers alike.

Acknowledgments

This book is based on my doctoral thesis defended at the University of Leuven in 2010. Unknowingly, what started out as a glance at an issue of the *European Review of Private Law* became both an academic and personal passion. One could even say that this subject found me, instead of the other way around. It combined my interests in various fields of European Union law, such as constitutional, private, and procedural law, and their counterparts in American law. It also captured my penchant for delving into subjects that had not yet been fully explored in either the European or the American settings. Yet, there were some trade-offs in undertaking this work, and truthfully, at times, it resembled something akin to the 'Myth of Sisyphus', where the more I attempted to go forward, the more I became mired in a sea of further unknowns, innumerable complexities, and of course considerable controversy. Thankfully, there were several persons who helped me along the way to bring this book to completion.

First and foremost, to my promoter, Professor Dr Koen Lenaerts, under whom I worked as a doctoral assistant and a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute for European Law of the University of Leuven, words cannot do justice to the ways in which he has given me invaluable guidance and helped me to grow in my academic career generally. I would also like to thank the other members of my doctoral jury, Professor Dr Wouter Devroe for his never-ending encouragement, as well as Professor Dr Jules Stuyck, Professor Dr Verica Trstenjak, and Professor Stephen Weatherill, all of whom prompted me to rethink and fine-tune my analysis of various points.

Secondly, there are several members of the Law Faculty of the University of Leuven, including Professor Dr Geert De Baere, Professor Dr Sophie Stijns, Professor Dr Geert Van Calster, Professor Dr Walter van Gerven, and Professor Dr Piet Van Nuffel, who inspired me along the way. And in the United States, a special note of appreciation goes to Professor Stephen Wallenstein for his support since my days as a law school student at the Duke University School of Law.

Thirdly, there are various persons and institutions without which the research for this book would not have been possible. I would like to thank the staff of the Law Library of the University of Leuven, particularly Jorinde Sercu who went beyond the call of duty to process my interlibrary loan requests and locate various publications on my behalf. I would also like to thank the Historical Archives of the European Commission, Claude Kappella of the European Economic and Social Committee Document Registry, and, most importantly, the European Parliament Document Registry for locating numerous documents that were pivotal to my research. I am further indebted to Pierre Schmitt for his translation of certain materials, and to Frans Van de Ven and Robin Schouten for their help with the logistics of relocating my research materials overseas.

Turning to the United States, I would like to express my utmost appreciation to Rodney A Ross of the Center for Legislative Archives. His invaluable assistance in locating various Congressional bills and responding to my numerous questions helped to make this book what it is, and, in fact, these materials proved to be one of the most eye-opening and exciting parts of my research. I would also like to thank the staff of the Law Libraries of Harvard University, New York University (NYU), and especially the University of California at Berkeley (Boalt) for allowing me access to their facilities and helping me to locate publications that would have been difficult to find elsewhere.

Fourthly, I owe a debt of gratitude to all those persons at Oxford University Press who helped to bring this book to print. In particular, this includes my editor Natasha Flemming for her patience and understanding throughout the process.

Finally, on a personal note, I feel grateful to say that I have four sets of 'families' whose support has been invaluable. My first 'family' is the Institute for European Law of the University of Leuven, which in addition to the above comprises Viviane Verbist, the Administrator of the Institute, and my colleagues, past and present—Angelina, Janek, Jos, Karl, Kristien, Marlies, Nana, Nathan, Pieter-Augustijn, Roel, Tim, Timothy, Tina, Tinne, Vanessa, and Vincent. My second 'extended family' from the second floor of the Valk and neighbouring buildings includes Hanne, Katrien, Sanderijn, Charline, Pierre, Thalia, Iasson, Govert, Bart, Dimitri, Jed, Thomas, Valérie, and so many more. My third 'family' consists of my friends in Belgium and the United States, especially Marianick and Patrick, Yolande and Carl, Vanessa and Bruno, Elke and Stefan, Glory, Lex, Alice, and TGS. Finally, there is my real 'family', including my best friend and soul sister Paula, my partner in life Luis, and my surrogate sister and aunt, Julie and Carol, respectively. And to my late mother and father, Donna and Stanley Gutman, who did not live to see this book in print, thank you for making my dreams possible and giving me the courage to follow them.

Admittedly, with the completion of this book—which generally reflects the state of the activities and law as of 1 June 2013—the all-consuming debate about European contract law and European private law continues to progress. Given the fast-paced nature of this debate, it is surely a challenge to complete any work in this area that will not be superseded by events soon after, or even before, publication. Nevertheless, if this book can play some part in helping to facilitate the 'constitutional conversation' about European contract (and private) law in the European Union and the 'comparative conversation' with the United States, then that is more than I could have hoped for.

KRG

Abbreviations

AALS Association of American Law Schools

ABA American Bar Association

ABAJ American Bar Association Journal
ABLJ American Business Law Journal
ADR Alternative Dispute Resolution
AFSI Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

AG Advocate General

AJCL American Journal of Comparative Law
AJIL American Journal of International Law
AJLH American Journal of Legal History

Ala L Rev Alabama Law Review
ALI American Law Institute

Am Bankr LJ American Bankruptcy Law Journal APSR American Political Science Review

BEUC Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs (European

Consumers' Organization)

BCICL Rev Boston College International and Comparative Law Review
BIICL British Institute of International and Comparative Law

B2B Business-to-business
B2C Business-to-consumer
Buff L Rev Buffalo Law Review
Bus Law Business Lawyer
Cal L Rev California Law Review
CAP Common Agricultural Policy
Case WRL Rev Case Western Reserve Law Review

CCBE Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe/Conseil des barreaux

européens

CCPA Consumer Credit Protection Act
CDC Centre de droit de la consommation

CDE Cahiers de droit européen

CECL Commission on European Contract Law

CESL Common European Sales Law
CFR Common Frame of Reference

CFSP Common Foreign and Security Policy

CISG United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International

Sale of Goods

CJEL Columbia Journal of European Law

CLJ Cambridge Law Journal
CLP Current Legal Problems
Col L Rev Columbia Law Review
Comm LJ Consumer Law Journal
Const Comm Const Comment

Cons Fin LQ Rep Consumer Finance Law Quarterly Report

CML Rev Common Market Law Review
CoR Committee of the Regions

Croatian YELP Croatian Yearbook of European Law and Policy
CSECL Centre for the Study of European Contract Law

CST EU Civil Service Tribunal

ECB

EUVR

CYELS Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies

DC District of Columbia

DCFR Draft Common Frame of Reference
DCT Draft Constitutional Treaty

DG Directorate General

Del J Corp L Delaware Journal of Corporate Law

DJCIL Duke Journal of Comparative and International Law

Duquesne BLJ Duquesne Business Law Journal
EAEC European Atomic Energy Community
EBLR European Business Law Review

EC European Community or (after Article number) Treaty

establishing the European Community before the entry into force

of the Lisbon Treaty European Central Bank

ECCG European Consumer Consultative Group

ECHR European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and

Fundamental Freedoms

ECJ European Court of Justice ECL European Contract Law

ECLG European Consumer Law Group
E Const L Rev European Constitutional Law Review

ECR European Court Reports

ECSC European Coal and Steel Community

Edin L Rev Edinburgh Law Review

EEC European Economic Community or (after Article number) Treaty

establishing the European Economic Community

EESC European Economic and Social Committee

EGC General Court

EHLASS European Home and Leisure Accidents Surveillance System

EIPA European Institute of Public Administration
EIPR European Intellectual Property Review
EJL & Econ European Journal of Law and Economics
EJLR European Journal of Legal Reform
ELF The European Legal Forum
ELI European Law Institute

ELI European Law Institute
ELJ European Law Journal
Elon L Rev Elon Law Review
ELR European Law Review
Emory LJ Emory Law Journal

EMU Economic and Monetary Union

ENISA European Network and Information Security Agency

EPL European Public Law
ERA Academy of European Law
ERCL European Review of Contract Law
ERPL European Review of Private Law

EU European Union or (after Article number) Treaty on European

Union before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty Zeitschrift für Europäisches Unternehmens- und

Verbraucherrecht/Journal of European Consumer and Market Law

Fordham ILJ Fordham International Law Journal

Fordham L Rev Fordham Law Review
FTC Federal Trade Commission
FTT Financial Transaction Tax

GLI German Law Journal

GPO United States Government Printing Office

GPR Zeitschrift für Gemeinschaftsprivatrecht/European Community

Private Law Review/Revue de droit privé communautaire

Hamline L Rev Hamline Law Review Hanse L Rev Hanse Law Review

Harv ILJ Harvard International Law Journal

Harv L Rev Harvard Law Review

Harv L & Pol'y Rev Harvard Law and Policy Review

Hastings LJ Hastings Law Journal Hofstra L Rev Hofstra Law Review

ICLQ International and Comparative Law Quarterly

IEE Institut d'etudes européenne IGC Intergovernmental Conference

Ind L Rev Indiana Law Review

Intl Rev L & Econ International Review of Law and Economics

Iowa L Rev Iowa Law Review

JCL Journal of Comparative Law JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies

JCP Journal of Consumer Policy
JDI Journal du droit international
JHA Justice and Home Affairs
II Juridica International

J Mar L & Comm Journal of Maritime Law and Commerce
JPIL Journal of Private International Law

J Soc Comp Legis Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation

KCLJ The King's College Law Journal

La L Rev Louisiana Law Review

L & Contemp Probs Law and Contemporary Problems

L & Hist Rev
L & Soc Inquiry
Lewis & Clark L Rev
Law and History Review
Law and Social Inquiry
Lewis and Clark Law Review

LIEI Legal Issues of Economic Integration

Loy L Rev Loyola Law Review

Loy LAL Rev Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review

LQ Rev Law Quarterly Review Mercer L Rev Mercer Law Review

MEP Member of the European Parliament

METRO Maastricht University Institute for Transnational Legal

Research/Maastrichts Europees Instituut voor Transnationaal

Rechtswetenschappelijk Onderzoek

Mich L Rev Michigan Law Review
Minn L Rev Minnesota Law Review

MJ Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law

MLR Modern Law Review

MMWA Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act

NCCUSL National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws

NCL Rev North Carolina Law Review
NIL Negotiable Instruments Law

Notre Dame L Rev Notre Dame Law Review

NTIR Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Internationaal Recht/Netherlands

International Law Review

Nw UL Rev Northwestern University Law Review

NY New York

NYLF New York Law Forum NYSBJ New York State Bar Journal

NYULQR New York University Law Quarterly Review

NYUL Rev New York University Law Review

Ohio St LJ Ohio State Law Journal

OJ Official Journal of the European Union

OJLS Oxford Journal of Legal Studies

Okla L Rev Oklahoma Law Review

OMC Open Method of Coordination
Pace IL Rev Pace International Law Review

Pace L Rev Pace Law Review

PEB Permanent Editorial Board

PECL Principles of European Contract Law

PEICL Principles of European Insurance Contract Law

PEL Principles of European Law

Penn St IL Rev Pennsylvania State International Law Review

Pepp L Rev Pepperdine Law Review

PJCCM Police and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters

Rabels Z Rabels Zeitschrift für ausländisches und internationales Privatrecht/

The Rabel Journal of Comparative and International Private Law

(Rabels Z)

RAE Revue des affaires européennes/Law & European Affairs

RCDIP Revue critique de droit international privé/French publication on

Private International Law

RDUE Revue du droit de l'Union Européenne

REDC Revue européenne de droit de la consummation/European Journal

of Consumer Law

RIDC Revue internationale de droit comparé
RTDC Revue trimestrielle de droit civil
RTDE Revue trimestrielle de droit européen
Rutgers-Cam LJ Rutgers Camden Law Journal

San Diego L Rev San Diego Law Review

SCE Société coopérative européenne/Statute for a European

Cooperative Society

SEA Single European Act

S III ULJ Southern Illinois University Law Journal
SME Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SPE European Private Company

Stan L Rev Stanford Law Review
St John's L Rev St John's Law Review

St Louis ULJ St Louis University Law Journal

Sw JIL Southwestern Journal of International Law

TED Tenders Electronic Daily
Temp L Rev Temple Law Review

TEU Treaty on European Union after the entry into force of the Lisbon

Treaty

Tex L Rev Texas Law Review

TFEU Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

TFL Rev Tilburg Foreign Law Review

The Harv Rev The Harvard Review

Tul Eur & Civ LF Tulane European and Civil Law Forum

Tul L Rev Tulane Law Review

UCC Uniform Commercial Code
UCCC Uniform Consumer Credit Code

UC Davis L Rev UC Davis Law Review

U Chi L Rev University of Chicago Law Review

UCITA Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act

U Colo L Rev
U III L F
University of Colorado Law Review
U III L F
University of Illinois Law Form
U Kan L Rev
University of Kansas Law Review
ULC
Uniform Law Commission

UK United Kingdom

U Miami L Rev University of Miami Law Review

UN United Nations

UNIDROIT Institut international pour l'unification du droit privé/

International Institute for the Unification of Private Law

Unif L Rev Uniform Law Review/Revue du droit uniforme

U Pa JIL University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law

U Pa L Rev University of Pennsylvania Law Review

US United States
Utah L Rev Utah Law Review
Utrecht L Rev Utrecht Law Review

TILEC Tilburg Law and Economics Center

Va L Rev Virginia Law Review
Vand L Rev Vanderbilt Law Review
Vill L Rev Villanova Law Review
Vt L Rev Vermont Law Review

Wash ULQ Washington University Law Quarterly

Willamette JIL & Disp Resol Willamette Journal of International Law and Dispute

Resolution

Wm & Mary L Rev William & Mary Law Review
YJIL Yale Journal of International Law

YLJ Yale Law Journal

YEL Yearbook of European Law

YPIL Yearbook of Private International Law

Z Eu P Zeitschrift für Europäisches Privatrecht/Journal of European

Private Law

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