Ralf Michaels

Globalizing Savigny?
The State in Savigny's Private International Law
and the Challenge from Europeanization and Globalization
I. Introduction*

1) Überseering and the “Obsolescence of Traditional Private International Law”

On November 5, 2002, the European Court of Justice rendered its decision in Überseering.1 Überseering was a company originally incorporated in the Netherlands, which had later transferred its effective seat of administration to Germany. Under German law, the effective seat determines the law applicable to a company. Thus, Überseering was now a German company that was not in compliance with German company law and thus lacked legal personality. Arguably, the company therefore had no locus standi to bring suit before German courts. The Court of Justice held that this violated the Treaty and that Germany was obliged to grant locus standi.2

This was the third time that the Court dealt with the legal personality of companies acting in a state different from that of their incorporation.3 In its Daily Mail decision in 1988,4 the Court had held that “unlike natural persons, companies are creatures of the law and, in the present state of Community law, creatures of national law. They exist only by virtue of the varying national legislation which determines their incorporation and functioning.”5 Consequently, it allowed the United Kingdom to condition the newspaper’s change of its corporate seat to the Netherlands on the satisfaction of its tax liability in the U.K. In 1999, the Court rendered its Centros decision.6 Two Danish citizens, in order to avoid the high registration costs under Danish law, had established a private Limited Company in England, Centros Ltd (with only nominal minimum capital which was never paid) and set up a subsidiary in Copenhagen. They were only interested in the subsidiary. Centros Ltd itself never became active and had no connection to England and Wales other than the incorporation. Therefore, Denmark wanted to treat the subsidiary as a Danish company, and refused registration unless the fees for Danish companies had been paid. The European Court of Justice ordered the Danish authorities to register the subsidiary, arguing that Centros Ltd had been incorporated legally under U.K. law, and the EC Treaty gave companies a right to form branches in other member states. The earlier Daily Mail judgment was not mentioned.

* The text is essentially in the form in which it was submitted in the spring of 2003; only some newer references have been added.
2 Before the Court of Justice decided Überseering, the German Bundesgerichtshof held that foreign companies with an effective seat in Germany had locus standi: Bundesgerichtshof, July 1, 2002, 2002 Neue Juristische Wochenschrift (NJW) 3539 = 23 Praxis des Internationalen Privatrechts (IPRax) 62, note Kindler p. 41; cf. Stefan Leible & Jochen Hoffmann, Vom “Nullum” zur Personengesellschaft – Die Metamorphose der Scheinauslandsgeellschaft im deutschen Recht, 55 Der Betrieb (DB), 2203 (2002).
5 Id., at no. 19.
All three decisions seem to concern an old problem of private international law—whether the law applicable to a company should be the law of its effective seat (seat principle) or that of its incorporation (incorporation principle). Indeed, academics in private international law took each of the Court’s decisions as deciding this dispute one way or the other. Daily Mail was understood to mean that member states were essentially free to apply one principle or the other. The United Kingdom applied the incorporation principle, but other states were free to apply the seat principle. This interpretation received a blow by the Centros decision, which suddenly seemed to hold that European law required member states to accept the incorporation principle. After all, Denmark was forced to recognize Centros Ltd. as a U.K. company, even though its effective seat was in Denmark. The Court of Justice was heavily criticized because it had not mentioned the Daily Mail decision, and had not said directly which of the two private international law principles should now govern. An underlying criticism was that the Court should refrain from interfering with private international law altogether.

Perhaps, however, there was no need for the Court of Justice to decide these questions at all, because they did not arise. Axel Flessner argues that both cases were not really private international law cases at all—the first involved international tax law, the second issues of registration. This interpretation may look comforting to the discipline of private international law; it may look untouched. On second view, however, it is even more threatening. It means that the Court does not use private international law doctrines at all for questions that are, or were, essentially questions of private international law. If such fundamental issues like a corporation’s personality are now decided under seemingly autonomous principles of EU law, what room remains for private international law at all? Where, and how, is it still relevant?

Indeed, in Überseering the German Bundesgerichtshof as the referring court tried to set this straight. The court did not restrain itself to asking whether it had to grant

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7 Private International Law, or Conflict of Laws, deals with three kinds of question: First is the question of jurisdiction: Which state’s courts are competent to rule on a fact pattern? Second is the question of choice of law: Which state’s law is applicable to a fact pattern? Third is the question of recognition and enforcement of foreign judgments and other public acts: Under what circumstances can such acts passed by another state be recognized and enforced? All three questions are interrelated, but here the focus shall be only on the second, namely choice of law.


9 Based on no. 23 of the decision, where the court explicitly acknowledges the differences between the legal systems of the member states.

10 For general criticism of the court’s approach to private international law see, e.g., Klaus Schurig, Unilateralistische Tendenzen im europäischen Gesellschaftskollisionsrecht, oder: Umgehung als Rechtsprinzip, in Liber amicorum Gerhard Kegel, 199–221 (Munich: Beck, 2002).

11 Axel Flessner, Schiffbruch der Interpreten und Statuten, 8 Zeitschrift für Europäisches Privatrecht (ZEuP) 1 (2000); see also Harald Halbhuber, Limited Company statt GmbH? Europarechtlicher Rahmen und deutscher Widerstand (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001); Halbhuber, National doctrinal structures and European company law, 38 Common Market Law Review (CMLR) 1385–1419 (2001), with an analysis of German comments on Daily Mail and Centros; against Flessner, see Schurig (supra n. 10) 201 f.: at least registration is an issue of private international law.

Überseering locus standi, but also, more generally, whether European law requires “that a company’s legal capacity and capacity to be a party to legal proceedings [locus standi] is to be determined according to the law of the State where the company is incorporated”. The Court of Justice decided that this is indeed what European law requires and thereby came as close to determining the private international law question as conceivable. This decision could raise mixed feelings in the private international law community. On the one hand, it makes official that member states have lost the freedom to determine the private international law principles autonomously – a blow to a discipline that sees conflict of laws as a matter for the individual states. On the other hand, the court seems at least to acknowledge that it is dealing with private international law matters, and therefore at least decides within a familiar doctrinal framework.

Actually, things may not be as easy. Even after Überseering, Christian Joerges speaks of the “obsolescence of private international law”. Arguably, the seat principle would still be reconcilable with the decision; it would only be restricted by principles of European law. The problem is that the Court of Justice does not decide questions of private international law as such. Its doctrinal framework, with free movements on the one hand, and restrictions justified by certain particular concerns of the member states on the other, does not translate easily into a doctrine of private international law (although attempts have been made). Even if such a translation is possible, however, it remains necessarily a translation – the decision-making process itself is not one of private international law. That discipline must apparently remain in a secondary rank; it can, at best, re-conceptualize what is decided by other disciplines.

2) Classical Private International Law and Globalization

This development is surprising. Private International Law, one would imagine, should be better prepared for the challenges posed by Europeanization and globalization than most any other legal discipline. Laws with impacts beyond territorial borders, while new

13 Überseering (supra n. 1) no. 21.
14 Überseering (supra n. 1) no. 93, 95.
18 Schürig (supra n. 11) 200.
for other legal disciplines, have almost by definition always constituted its main object of studies. After all, a “conflict of laws” (the discipline’s other name) is only possible if more than one legal regulation is, on its face, applicable to a certain fact pattern.

Likewise, the discipline both knew of and dealt with the appearance of “the private” in the international sphere long before this became an issue of globalization discourse. This is evidenced in the discipline’s other name, Private International Law, coined already in the 19th century by Joseph Story. Story’s ideal of a largely apolitical common approach to private law questions, mirrored also in his concept of a far-reaching general common law transcending state borders, which he developed in the U.S. Supreme Court decision of Swift v. Tyson, still shapes thoughts in the field.

This may be the reason why private international law scholars have not, by and large, seen the need to adapt the field to the new paradigms of globalization. In this respect, the field differs remarkably from others. For example, in the field of human rights, philosophical ideas of universal vs. local values, the interrelatedness of the state’s relation to its citizens on the one hand and to humanity as a whole on the other, now shape much of the legal discussion. Likewise, intellectual property law is now changing its outlook and structure, embracing supranational regulations like the TRIPS agreement, transnational concepts for transactions outside the scope of such supranational solutions, and also solutions to insulate local structures of innovation and cultural production from the threat of hegemonic commercialization.

20 See infra n. 21.
22 Swift v. Tyson, 41 U.S. (16 Pet.) 1, 10 L.Ed. 865 (1842). This decision was overruled by Erie Railroad Co. v. Tompkins, 304 U.S. 64, 58 S. Ct. 817, 82 L.Ed. 1188 (1938) (arguing, amongst others, that no law exists without some definite state authority behind it).
23 Some exceptions: Peter Behrens, Die Bedeutung des Kollisionsrechts für die “Globalisierung” der Wirtschaft, in: Aufbruch nach Europa, (J. Basedow et al. eds., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); Pedro de Miguel Asensio, El Derecho internacional privado ante la globalización, I Anuario Español de Derecho Internacional Privado 37–87 (2001); J. C. Gonzáles, Globalización y Derecho internacional privado (Murcia, 2002). Admittedly, there is more readiness to accept Europeanization of the field. See, most recently, M. Wilderspin & X. Lewis, Les relations entre le droit communautaire et les règles de conflits de lois des Etats membres, 91 Revue critique de droit international privé 1–37, 289–313 (2002). Here, a connection between Europeanization and globalization is not usually established, however, whereas many of the arguments in this paper should be relevant for globalization as well. See also Ralf Michaels, Welche Globalisierung für das Recht? Welches Recht für die Globalisierung?, 69 RabelsZ 525–544 (2005).
Few such developments can be seen in the conflict of laws.\textsuperscript{25} Sure, many monographs and articles in the field now invoke, in their introductions, either globalization explicitly, or some equally vague concepts like “a world growing ever closer together”, or a “growing number of international transactions and situations”. From this, their authors draw only the conclusion that conflict of laws is becoming more important, not that it must change its structure to account for these developments. Yet the reality looks different. Conflict of laws, as a discipline, seems to become less and less important. In the European Union, we see developments towards a Europeanization of conflict of laws.\textsuperscript{26} Yet this development should not conceal the fact that a large part of conflict of laws has already become Europeanized: a substantive part of the case-law rendered by the Court of Justice in the area of the freedoms concerns cases that traditionally would have been conflict of laws cases. On a global level, various international regimes compete with national legal orders, and amongst each other.\textsuperscript{27} Even in Europe, questions of both adjudicatory jurisdiction and applicable law are often determined rather through the interpretation of statutes and the determination of their (ominous) “extraterritorial applicability” than through classical conflict of laws methods.\textsuperscript{28} “Classical” scholars of private international law have surprisingly little to say within these developments; instead, they often propose legal unification to overcome conflicts,\textsuperscript{29} and to restrict conflict of laws, as a “second best”, to areas where such unification seems impossible.\textsuperscript{30}

The discipline’s faith in a universal law of mankind,\textsuperscript{31} as well as the tendency to try and avoid clashes of policy, are not accidental. Both are elements stemming from the birth of classical private international law, as developed in the 19th century by Savigny.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{25} Klaus Günther & Shalini Randeria, Recht, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Prozeß der Globalisierung, 21 f. (Bad Homburg: Werner Reimers Stiftung, 2001).


\textsuperscript{27} On the conflict between such regimes see Joost Pauwelyn, Conflict of Norms in Public International Law (Cambridge, 2003).


\textsuperscript{32} Friedrich Carl von Savigny, 8 System des heutigen Römischen Rechts (1849), hereinafter VIII System. English quotations are from the translation by William Guthrie, published as “A Treatise on the Conflict of Laws” (Edinburgh, 1880).
Savigny’s conception of conflict of laws, after a crisis in the 1960s and 1970s, has returned to being the paradigm of conflict of laws thinking, at least in Europe. Its neutrality with regard to different legal systems, its assumption of a private law relatively free of state intervention, seem ideal for a neo-liberal globalization. Furthermore, many deem the “classical” Savignyan system sufficiently flexible to account for new developments and see no need for another conflicts revolution.

3) The State as Lens

This hope may be in vain for the following reason. If classical private international law rests on a state paradigm, and if the role of the state in globalization is no longer the same as it was in the 19th (and most of the 20th) century, then the field has lost much of its foundation. This can only become visible once we make the state the lens through which to analyze both classical private international law and modern developments. This seems justified, at least from the viewpoint of globalization. After all, the changing situation of the state is one important, perhaps the decisive, aspect of globalization. Whether indeed it loses in importance, whether it gains, or whether it just undergoes a transmutation – almost everyone agrees that the state’s position in the world is now different from its position in the 19th century. This should have an impact on private international law, if it is connected to the state.

This paper cannot show that (classical) private international law is inadequate for globalization. At best, it can show a much more limited claim to be true or at least probable: that the conception of private international law developed by Savigny in the 19th century does not hold out to the challenges of globalization. This is a much more modest argument, but I hope not an irrelevant one. After all, private international law, at least in continental Europe, is still based to a large degree on ideas of Savigny. Furthermore, while

there are several studies on Savigny’s conception of private international law, the role of the state in it has not yet been analyzed with regard to globalization.

One may argue that today’s private international law looks very different from that of Savigny. This is certainly the case. My claim is only that certain essential elements still exist more or less in the way that they underlie Savigny’s conception, and that these elements are connected to the State and become problematic in globalization. Further developments within the theory are then not decisive for the argument (although this can, of course, only be assumed here). Because the conception is established in the 19th century, it is there that we have to look for the paradigms that still, if secretly, shape the discipline.

Another possible criticism is that even in the 19th century Savigny is not the only important figure in private international law, that at least two other writers must be mentioned: Joseph Story and Pasquale Stanislao Mancini. Again, the criticism would be valid. Yet it may be justified to focus only on Savigny, at least for now. Both for Story’s and Mancini’s conceptions, the role of the state is evident. Story bases his private international law on comity between states, Mancini bases his on nationality and sovereignty, both see the discipline as part of international law. The role of the state in Savigny’s conception is much less obvious. If it can be shown that even for Savigny the state is not only relevant but predominant, we can be relatively sure that the state permeates private international law thinking in the 19th century altogether. With these caveats, the analysis can begin.

II. The State in Savigny’s Private International Law

The State has found various different forms in history, and these various forms have been relevant for conceptions of the conflict of laws in different times. The nation state is relatively recent and may be of fleeting importance. When we look at Savigny’s conception of the conflict of laws, we must be aware that he writes before the advent in Germany, and as an opponent of, the modern “nation state”.


40 Story (supra n. 21) §§ 33–38, pp. 43–49.

41 Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, Della nazionalità come fondamento del diritto delle genti (E. Jayme, ed., Torino: Giappichelli, 1994); Mancini, De l’utilité de rendre obligatoires pour tous les Etats, sous la forme d’un ou de plusieurs traités internationaux, un certain nombre de règles générales du Droit international privé pour assurer la décision uniforme des conflits entre les différentes législations civiles et criminelles, 1 Journal du droit international privé (Clunet) 221 (1874); see Halpérin (supra n. 38) 67–85.

42 See Martin van Creveld, The Rise and Decline of the State (1999).

Nevertheless it should be safe to start with the classical definition of the state rendered by the German tradition of “Allgemeine Staatslehre”, as developed by Georg Jellinek: 44 The state is the organisation of sedentary people which has original sovereign power. 45 Here, the state is defined by three elements: a territory, a population, and state power which I will here translate as (internal) sovereignty. 46 What remains to be shown is that both the state in general and all three of its elements can be found in, and influence, Savigny’s private international law.

1) The Role of the State for Private Law

Fleeting knowledge of Savigny and his theory of law as born from the people’s spirit (Volksgeist) might lead one to believe that for him law, at least private law, exists outside the state. Savigny would then be the perfect idol for a “global law without a state”, as is proposed for globalization. 47 It is well known that Savigny is an opponent of codification, 48 and that, although he approves of the primacy of legislation over customary and scientific law, 49 he does not think highly of state legislation in the area of private law in general. Yet it would be a fundamental misunderstanding to think that Savigny’s conception of (private) law was independent of the state. 50 Granted, Savigny argues that law emanates from the people, so neither state nor jurists seem necessary. Nevertheless, there are two important connections between state and private law in Savigny’s thinking.

The first one may appear obvious: the state enforces the law, through civil procedure and criminal law, including criminal procedure. Savigny calls this the “first and irrefutable task of the state, to make the idea of law govern in the visible world”. 51 Yet these areas of the law are public law (öffentliches Recht) and thus distinct from private law. Savigny’s private law exists independent of its enforcement in the courts, and is therefore not, as it often is in the common law world, part of civil procedure.

45 “Der Staat ist die mit ursprünglicher Herrschermacht ausgerüstete Verbandseinheit sesshafter Menschen”. Jellinek (supra n. 44) p. 180 f.
47 Global Law Without a State (Gunther Teubner ed., Aldershot et al., 1997).
50 As is apparently assumed by Christian Joerges, Zum Funktionswandel des Kollisionsrechts, 6 (1971); Seif (supra n. 38) 501: law as organic expression of the people, not part of the state order (“organische Lebensäußerung des Volkes und nicht Bestandteil der staatlichen Ordnung”); already Klaus Vogel, Der räumliche Anwendungsbereich der Verwaltungsrechtsnorm, 215 ff. (Frankfurt/M. & Berlin, 1965). For Savigny, this antagonism of people and state does not exist, because his conception of the state is different.

128
This connection between state and private law becomes relevant, however, in a more
general sense, and this is the second connection. Savigny does not distinguish between
state as government and as people, as Anglo-American theories would do. Quite to the
contrary, he argues explicitly that every people appears as state. Consequently, a state of
nature – where there is private law without a state – is inconceivable, and “private
legislation” (or even private codification), in particular private contracts, do not
become law (unlike the famous Art. 1134 of the French Code Civil). Put simply, just as
the people only attain reality through the state, the people’s (private) law becomes law only
through the state as well. Savigny’s political conservatism prevents him from embracing
ideas of a quasi-spontaneous privately formed law.

Thus, private law is always state law. However, Savigny’s state is not a government
separate from the people, with discretion to legislate as the ruler pleases. Instead, because
Savigny sees the state as the organizing form of the people, consequently legislation
emanates from, and therefore reflects, both customary and scientific law. What Savigny
rejects is not the idea of private law as state law, but of private law based on a ruler’s
discretion, on politics. Politics can be left to public law – an area of the law that Savigny
distinguishes sharply from private law. Public law is political (and therefore unscientific
and comparably uninteresting from a scientific point of view), private law is scientific
and in this sense apolitical, pure.

52 Savigny, I System § 9, p. 23: “Vielmehr wird jedes Volk, sobald es als solches erscheint, zugleich als
Staat erscheinen, wie auch dieser gestaltet seyn möge.” § 10, p. 29: “müssen wir wiederholt
behalten, daß der Staat ursprünglich und naturgemäß in einem Volk, durch das Volk, und für das
Volk entsteht.” (emphases in original). See already Savigny, Juristische Methodenlehre – nach der
Ausarbeitung des Jakob Grimm, 14 (Wesenberg, ed., 1951); cf.Strauch (supra n. 51) 20–22, 98.

53 Okko Behrends, Geschichte, Politik und Jurisprudenz in F. C. v. Savignys System des heutigen
römischen Rechts, in Römisches Recht in der europäischen Tradition – Symposium aus Anlaß des 75.

54 Ferdinand Kirchhof, Private Rechtsetzung (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1987); Global Law Without
a State (supra n. 47).

55 Catherine Kessedjian, La codification privée, in E Pluribus Unum – Liber amicorum Georges A. L.
Droz, 135–149 (1996); Ralf Michaels, Privatautonomie und Privatkodifikation, 62 RabelsZ 580–626

56 Savigny, I System § 6, p. 12. For the question of contract as a source of law in Roman law see Zoltán
Végh, Ex pacto ius – Studien zum Vertrag als Rechtsquelle bei den Rhetoren, 110 Zeitschrift für
Rechtsgeschichte, Romanistische Abteilung (SavZ/Rom), 184–295 (1993). Savigny was also
opposed to social contract theories of the state, see Savigny, I System § 10, p. 29.

57 “Les conventions légalement formées tiennent lieu de loi à ceux qui les ont faits.”

58 Savigny, I System § 9.

59 Savigny, Vom Beruf (supra n. 48) 16 (Thibaut and Savigny, 106); Savigny, Über den Zweck dieser
Zeitschrift [Zeitschrift für geschichtliche Rechtswissenschaft]; in Thibaut and Savigny (supra n. 48)
261–268, 264.

60 See Joachim Rückert, Idealismus, Jurisprudenz und Politik bei Friedrich Carl von Savigny, 397–399
(Ebelsbach: Verlag Rolf Gremer 1984); Olivier Beaud, Savigny et le droit public. Plaidoyer pour
une lecture politique de l’œuvre de Savigny, in Recht zwischen Natur und Geschichte, 193–205 (Ius
Commune Sonderheft 100, Kervégan & Mohnhaupt eds., 1997). For connections between the
historical school and public law, see Michael Stolleis, Die historische Schule und das öffentliche
Recht, in Die Bedeutung der Wörter – Studien zur europäischen Rechtsgeschichte, Festschrift für Sten
Gagnér, 495–508 (Stolleis ed., 1991). See also Claudio Cesa, Sulle idee politiche della scuola storica,

61 See Joachim Rückert, The Unrecognized Legacy: Savigny’s Influence on German Jurisprudence after
1900, 37 Am. J. Comp. L. 121–137, 136 (1989); Rückert, Savignys Konzeption von Jurisprudenz und
Thus we find that the state plays a central role for Savigny’s conception of all law, including private law. This central role is quintessential for the development of classical private international law as well. By transcending the distinction between people and state, Savigny makes it possible to think of private law as the emanation of the people’s spirit, and still conceptualize private international law as a system of conflicts between state laws. On the one hand, the state enforces laws (domestic or foreign) with its institutions, namely the judge. On the other side of the equation, the sovereign state also defines, and limits, the “law” to be chosen by choice of law, the applicable law. The classical choice-of-law process always directs the state judge to apply state law. Thus, the state is present both as enforcer, and as creator of enforceable law, as subject and object of the choice-of-law process.

2) Sovereignty

Thus, the state is indeed central to Savigny’s private international law. How do Jellinek’s three elements fare? The first element of interest is sovereignty. Sovereignty is, of course, quintessential for theories of private international law as part of international law. Thus, before Savigny, Joseph Story devotes passages of his treatise to comity as a way to overcome concerns of sovereignty. After Savigny, Mancini sees sovereignty as one building block of private international law. Yet both consider private international law as international law, so the importance of sovereignty is not surprising. How does sovereignty figure in Savigny’s concept of private international law? Is not sovereignty reserved to questions of public law (and politics)?

Generally, the question appears in private international law as perhaps its primordial problem: Why should a judge ever apply foreign law? Why should he, if his own law and foreign law provide different rules for the situation at hand, prefer the foreign law to his own? From a practical point of view, there may be several reasons – predictability and uniformity of results, party expectations, all these are considerations favoring such application. Also, if a legislator directs the judge to apply foreign law, positive law solves the question. Yet legislation is rare at Savigny’s time (and still incomplete today). Moreover, this positivistic recourse to the legislature does not answer the prior philosophical/political problem involved in submitting to foreign law, both as a question outside legislation, and as a question for the legislator.

At least three ideas have been conceived to justify such a submission. First, one might want to circumvent the problem by arguing that the judge does not really apply foreign law


62 For this aspect see particularly Rückert (supra n. 60) 312–328.

63 Gerhard Kegel & Klaus Schurig (supra n. 37) 16; Rest. (2d) Conflict of Laws § 1 (1971); Michaels (supra n. 37) 1228–1231.

64 Supra n. 44.

65 Savigny, VIII System 26, 130.

66 The third solution is the fiction that the judge applies a new ad hoc rule of his own law, modeled after that of the foreign legal system. This solution, disregarded by Savigny, has been favored both in the United States as “local law theory”, and in Italy as “incorporation theory”. For the U.S. see Guinness
at all (and therefore does not submit to the foreign sovereign). This solution materializes in the 19th century theory of vested rights ("wohlerworbene Rechte", 67 "droits acquis" 68). As Dicey, one of its most important later propagators, writes: "[T]he courts, e.g. of England, never in strictness enforce foreign law; when they are said to do so, they enforce not foreign laws, but rights acquired under foreign laws." 69 The theory gains even more popularity in the United States, where it enters into the Restatement through its propagator Beale 70 – before being debunked by legal realism. 71 In Europe, this debunking has already taken place when Savigny writes his 1849 treatise on private international law. In 1841/42, Carl Georg von Wächter has rejected the theory on two grounds. First it is circular: the judge cannot determine whether a right has been acquired under a foreign law without applying that foreign law; yet whether that law is applicable is exactly what the process should establish. Second, the argument is inconclusive: only the state that has granted a right can be held obliged to enforce it; that state cannot impose an obligation on other states to enforce rights "vested" under its law. 72 Savigny approves. 73

The second theory to avoid a clash between sovereigns is the theory of comitas (Voet, Huber), comity (Dicey, Story), or courtoisie (Foelix, Vareilles-Sommieres) 74. Under this theory, sovereigns enforce each other’s laws on the basis of courtesy. This is less than an obligation (thus there is no submission), but more than mere discretion, 75 a very vague concept somewhere between law and politics / international relations. The problem with the concept is, of course, that it only explains why, in certain situations, sovereigns may


68 Antoine Pillet, La théorie générale des droits acquis, 8 Recueil des Cours 485–538 (1925–III).


70 Restatement, Conflict of Laws (1934); Joseph Beale, Treatise on the Conflict of Laws (1935); see also Soater v. Mexican National Railroad Co., 194 U.S. 120, 126 (1904) per J. Holmes.

71 For an attempted revival, see Perry Dane, Vested Rights, "Vestedness", and Choice of Law, 96 Yale L. J. 1191–1275 (1987) with further references.


73 Savigny, I System § 361, p. 132.


75 But see Alan Watson, Joseph Story and the Comity of Errors (Athens and London: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1992) (arguing that Huber had stated a duty to apply foreign law, and that Story, in invoking a degree of discretion, had misunderstood him).
agree to enforce foreign laws, but does not give any guidelines or principles when this is, or should be, done.

Savigny accepts this concept of comity but changes it dramatically. On the one hand, he establishes comity as a duty to apply foreign laws. On the other hand, he denies that any submission of one sovereign to the other is necessary. Indeed, he does not see choice of law as a problem of sovereignty at all. The reason must be seen in his conception of private law. Differences between the private laws of states are a fact of the European state of things in the 19th century. Yet they are not, in Savigny’s mind, based on clashes of politics or sovereigns, but on an imperfect state of development, and they can be overcome over time. Thus, the conflict of laws is no real conflict for Savigny, because the ground for differences was not different political opinions. By privatizing conflict of laws, Savigny avoids the possibility of a clash.

The reason for the lack of a clash is only partly the apolitical character of private law. Another important factor is Savigny’s conviction that all Christian nations (and these are the only ones he is interested in) ultimately share the same underlying values in their private laws. Thus, even if private law is not value-free, a conflict of laws between Christian nations is still not a conflict between different values, because Christianity serves as an overarching framework within which conflicts take place.

This “privatization” of choice of law can also be seen in Savigny’s method. Instead of determining the territorial scope of statutes, Savigny seeks for the “seat” of a “legal relation” in order to determine the law applicable to it. This has famously been called a “Copernican Revolution” (“kopernikanische Wende”). Logically, the difference is one of starting point only, not of result: Whether one determines the scope of a statute and then finds which relations fit under it, or whether one starts with the relation and determines the applicable statute, should make no difference in outcome. Savigny was well aware of this himself. Yet there is a difference. Partly it is (merely) psychological. By starting with the legal relation, Savigny is able to assert an argumentative primacy of this relation over the applicable law. It is not the lawmaker who decides what situations he wants to cover, it is the situation which determines the appropriate lawmaker. Starting with the statute and its scope of application has a political, public overtone; starting with the legal relation emphasizes the private, apolitical character of the choice-of-law process. Actually,

76 Savigny, VIII System § 348, p. 28: “freundliche Zulassung”.
77 Ibid.
78 Savigny, VIII System § 348, p. 25; see also Seif (supra n. 38) 509.
80 Savigny’s depoliticization of choice of law has been emphasized frequently; see only critically J. E. J. Th. Deelen, De blinddoek van von Savigny (Amsterdam, 1966); Hans Ulrich Jessurun d’Oliveira, De ruine van een paradigma: de konfliktrgel (Deventer, 1976); Joerges (supra n. 50), 9f.
81 Savigny, VIII System § 346, p. 17. Story had already distinguished Christian from heathen laws: Story (supra n. 21) § 25, p. 36.
82 Neuhaus (supra n. 79) 366 (1949/50).
83 Savigny, I System § 344, pp. 1–3; cf. Schurig (supra n. 35) 115 f.
84 Kegel & Schurig (supra n. 37) 165 f., with a slightly different emphasis.
however, there is no psychological. By looking at the (potential) scope of application of a statute, it is possible that more than one statute claims applicability – a true conflict in the jargon of governmental interest analysis. If we start with the legal relation, such a true conflict is impossible: a legal relation has only one seat, and this seat determines the applicable law. Conflicts are made impossible.

Consequently, this apolitical conception of choice of law is appropriate only for private law in a narrow sense. Savigny himself proposes a different treatment for “laws, whose peculiar nature does not admit of so free an application of the community of law obtaining between different states”. He distinguishes two kinds of such laws: first “laws of a strictly positive, imperative nature”, and second, “legal institutions of a foreign state, of which the existence is not at all recognized in ours, and which, therefore, have no claim to the protection of our courts”. In modern terminology, these are internationally mandatory rules and the public policy exception. Here, sovereignty does play a role: the legislator’s will is decisive. Savigny acknowledges a political choice-of-law system with the possibility of clashing sovereignties, and it may be due to the relative brevity of his article devoted to the question that this aspect has become only an exception, an afterthought to classical choice of law.

In one sense, therefore, it Savigny’s concept of private international law may seem less closely linked to state sovereignty – and thus more apt for globalization – than that of other authors. If private law is essentially value-neutral (at least vis-à-vis other Christian states), then there seems to be no need to restrict private international law to state laws, linked with a sovereign. It seems possible to apply non-state laws, chosen according to non-state criteria, as well. Yet such a concept would no longer be in accordance with Savigny’s concept because of his emphasis on a necessary connection between law and state. As a matter of fact, this necessary connection makes the state particularly important for his approach. Others may distinguish between sovereign-related private laws, where conflicts must be solved by comity or some other means, and other private laws, where the state can be left behind. For Savigny, this second category of laws simply does not exist.

3) Territory

The second element of the state – territory – has perhaps become even more important than the first. Savigny is not, of course, the first to introduce territory into private international law. Almost since the birth of the discipline, there has been a growing tension between the older principle of personality and the younger one of territoriality. In the middle

85 See also Paul Heinrich Neuhaus, Abschied von Savigny?, 46 RabZ 1–25, 8 f. (1982).
87 Savigny, VIII System § 349, p. 32.
88 Id. at § 349, p. 33.
89 Id. at § 349, p. 34 f.
90 In a sense, both the governmental interest analysis in the United States and the “political school” of choice of law in Germany only reverse the rule-exception relation: for them, the political aspect becomes the rule, the apolitical one the exception.
ages, the applicable law was that of the individual’s clan, a personal criterion. Territoriality arises, as the factor to determine the applicable law, with the rise of the territorial state. As such, however, it is closely connected to questions of sovereignty – because sovereignty is territorial, so is the scope of jurisdiction, the reach of the sovereign’s will.

In the light of this close connection between sovereignty (over territory) and territoriality, it is interesting to note that Savigny, while otherwise rather opposed to sovereignty as basis for private international law, not only maintains, but even enhances the territorial aspect. For him, the conflict of laws is not a conflict of sovereigns over territories, but still a conflict of territorial laws. His relevant criterion to determine the applicable law is the “seat” ("Sitz"), the “home” ("Heimath") of a legal relation. This is evidently a territorial quality of this relation, making it necessary to place it in a physical, territorial location.

The seat may not be a purely territorial concept, at least not in a purely factual sense. Savigny is eager to distinguish his approach not only from the theory of vested rights with its territorial idea that rights “vest” in a territory before their bearer travels. He also criticizes an earlier German author, Wilhelm Peter Schaeffner, although Schaeffner also emphasizes the legal relations as the starting point, trying to determine “where it came into existence”. The difference is not easy to spot. In all likelihood, Savigny is critical of Schaeffner’s apparent emphasis on a merely factual geographical determination. Apparently, Savigny’s conception of “seat” (just as that of Besitz, possession), is not merely factual, but a combination of factual (geographical) and ideal/legal elements.

Nevertheless, as a consequence of the emphasis of the “seat”, Savigny’s choice-of-law rules for particular legal relations are entirely territorial in nature. He sees four relevant elements: domicile, place of a thing, place of an act, place of the court. All four elements are territorial in nature. Consequently, it is not surprising that Savigny’s particular choice-of-law rules are territorial as well. Personal status is determined by domicile (§§ 362–365), the same is true for the law of succession (§§ 379–380) and matrimonial questions; here, the husband’s domicile is decisive (§ 379–380). The law of things is determined by the location of the things (for movable and immovable property alike) (§§ 366–368). The law of contract depends on a territorial connection as well: the place of performance (§ 370). Discarded is another possible territorial connection, the place of execution; it remains relevant for formal requirements of juridical acts (§ 381).

91 Savigny, VIII System § 346, p. 18, defines the relevant question as: “What territorial law is applicable in any given case?” (emphasis in original).
92 VIII System § 360, p. 108; see already § 348, p. 28.
93 Id. at § 360, p. 108, § 361, p. 120.
95 Supra, p. 131.
97 Kegel (supra n. 21) 61 is “taken aback” by Savigny’s criticism of Schaeffner.
98 Savigny, Das Recht des Besitzes. Eine civilistische Abhandlung 22 (Gießen: Heyer 1803).
99 Savigny, VIII System, § 361, p. 120 f.
Most of these results are not new compared to those of older theories.\textsuperscript{100} Savigny emphasizes territory over personality more than others before him, but he remains within the old territoriality / personality dichotomy. Nevertheless, the change he brings about in the starting point of the analysis – the legal relation – places these traditional results on a whole new basis. Under the old statute theory, the territoriality principle has been a direct function of the territorial boundaries of sovereignty. The sovereign power extended only to the state’s boundaries; hence the state’s laws have a territorially limited scope of application. Savigny’s conception of legal relations, because it does not rely on the basis of such power, could, in theory, allow for non-territorial factors to determine the applicable law as well – provided that law could be thought as non-territorial. Yet ultimately it appears that Savigny uses territorial factors because law is still territorial for him. The law’s territoriality comes not from the sovereign’s limited power but from the territoriality of the people as the source of private law.\textsuperscript{101} This territoriality of law is nowhere really justified (at least not in Vol. VIII of the System) but rather assumed; yet that only makes it more relevant for Savigny’s private international law.

4) Citizenship

Territoriality does not become the predominant principle for the conflict of laws without an argument. In fact, Savigny devotes a lengthy passage to the distinction between origo and domicilium, or origin (a personal concept) and domicile (a territorial concept).\textsuperscript{102} The relative length of this passage may seem surprising.\textsuperscript{103} One possible explanation is rather trivial: the American Joseph Story, in his work on the conflict of laws that will be so influential on Savigny,\textsuperscript{104} starts with the definition of domicile.\textsuperscript{105} Yet there is also a political background to Savigny’s need to explain, at length, his preference of territoriality over citizenship. The personality principle was originally, in pre-modern times, a tribal concept;\textsuperscript{106} as such, it is outdated for Savigny’s time and easy to discard. Yet the personality principle has been reinvented, so to speak, as the principle of nationality, together with the birth of the nation state. Art. 3 (3) of the new French Code Civil provides: “The laws relating to the condition and privileges of persons govern Frenchmen, although residing in a foreign country.”\textsuperscript{107} Here, the connecting factor is a personal one, namely

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} Seif (supra n. 38), 496–499.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Savigny, VIII System, § 346, p. 16 f.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Halpérin (supra n. 38), 58 thinks that the passage “paraît anachronique, voire inutile, au lecteur moderne”.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Kegel (supra n. 21).
\item \textsuperscript{105} Story (supra n. 21), ch. 3, pp. 50 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Savigny himself wrote about the medieval principle; see his Geschichte des römischen Rechts im Mittelalter, 115 ff. (2nd ed., 1834). See, more recently, Simeon L. Guterman, The Principle of the Personality of Law in the Early Middle Ages: A Chapter in the Evolution of Western Legal Institutions and Ideas, 21 U. of Miami L. Rev. 259–348 (1966/67); Guterman, The Principle of the Personality of Law in the Germanic Kingdoms of Western Europe from the Fifth to the Eleventh Century (Peter Lang, 1990); Keller & Siehr (supra n. 67) §§ 2–3, pp. 11–20 (1986).
\item \textsuperscript{107} See Halpérin (supra n. 38) 25 f.
\end{itemize}
nationality. Savigny thinks the principle itself mostly irrelevant in practice\textsuperscript{108} – an evaluation which is hardly true even in his time. More importantly, the underlying idea of nationality must be anathema to his political thinking, just as the nation state was, and potentially dangerous. Savigny does see the attractiveness of nationality. He considers the possibility of limiting domicile to conflicts of laws within a state, and adopting nationality for conflicts between different states, but rejects nationality as a connecting factor here as well.\textsuperscript{109} It is only Mancini in Italy, somewhat later, who introduces the principle of nationality as one of the three determining factors for private international law\textsuperscript{110} (the other two being party autonomy\textsuperscript{111} and sovereign state interests) and makes it so popular that the German legislator, who is otherwise thought to have followed Savigny in many respects,\textsuperscript{112} adopts nationality over domicile as the connecting factor for personal issues.\textsuperscript{113}

The connection between a principle of nationality and the (nation) state is easier to see than that between Savigny’s concept of domicile and the state. Nevertheless, such a connection exists. Savigny’s rejection of nationality as connecting factor reflects a rejection of the nation state, not of the state as such. A valuable insight comes from Savigny’s conception of the citizen.\textsuperscript{114} This conception is less political than a concept of nationality. In fact, in his treatise on private international law, he admits that domicile (as the determining factor) is more accidental, and more open to manipulation by the individual, than other criteria.\textsuperscript{115} Nevertheless, citizenship is what defines the individ-

\textsuperscript{108} Savigny, VIII System § 359, p. 98 f.
\textsuperscript{109} Savigny, VIII System § 359, pp. 98–101. Savigny discusses the French code civil and the Prussian General Land Law and omits the Austrian General Civil Code, which, in its Art. 4, provided applicability of the Code on Austrian nationals. On private international law in the three natural law codifications, see Halpérin (supra n. 38) 22–27.
\textsuperscript{112} This may actually be a post facto reinterpretation, no doubt facilitated because a large part of the travaux préparatoires were not published until 1973: Die geheimen Materialien zur Kodifikation des deutschen IPR 1881–1896 (Hartwieg & Korkisch eds., 1973); see also I Die Vorlagen der Redaktoren für die erste Kommission zur Ausarbeitung des Entwurfs eines Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuches, Allgemeiner Teil, Verfasser Albert Gebhard, 129–308 (Werner Schubert ed., 1981); Michael Behn, Die Entstehungsgeschichte der einseitigen Kollisionsnormen des EGBGB . . ., 19–194 (Frankfurt/M.: Haag & Herchen, 1980). On the legislator’s approach to choice of law, see Oskar Hartwieg, Der Gesetzgeber des EGBGB zwischen den Fronten heutiger Kollisionsrechts-Theorien, 42 RabelsZ 431–455, 433 (1978) (arguing that Savigny was comparatively unimportant).
\textsuperscript{114} Hans-Christof Kraus, Begriff und Verständnis des “Bürgers” bei Savigny, 110 SavZ/Rom 552–601 (1993); id. 587 f. on the passages in VIII System.
\textsuperscript{115} Savigny, VIII System § 346, p. 17.
ual’s membership with the people. Since, in turn, the people has its reality in the state, citizenship, mediated through the people, connects the individual with the law of a particular state. Savigny says so explicitly.\textsuperscript{116} Thus, citizenship (as a factor of the state) does play a role for Savigny’s private international law, and it is connected to the state.

With regard to private international law, Savigny’s concept of citizenship collapses into a territorial concept, namely domicile. Savigny considers nationality less relevant for two reasons, and both are interesting from a view of globalization. The first indeed sounds strikingly modern and global: the increasing commerce between the peoples makes differences between nationalities less harsh and less relevant.\textsuperscript{117} Yet there is a second, somewhat more startling reason: “The influence of Christianity ... as a common bond of spiritual life embracing the most diverse nations, has thrown their characteristic differences more and more into the background.”\textsuperscript{118} This means that Savigny’s system of private international law is really made only for Christian nations, and excludes non-Christians, especially Jews.\textsuperscript{119} Savigny’s relation to the Jews has been the object of several studies\textsuperscript{120} and is not of interest here as such. What is relevant is the somewhat paradoxical result that Savigny’s concept of domicile makes different treatment of Jews within the applicable territorial law possible. A nationality principle in the sense of the modern nation states would, normally, emancipate the Jews and thereby treat them like other nationals – as happened in France in 1791.\textsuperscript{121} A different interpersonal private international law could treat the Jews as a different nation and apply their own laws to them. While Savigny does apparently consider such a treatment of the Christian church as independent from the state,\textsuperscript{122} the Jews do not benefit from such treatment. Under Savigny’s territorial approach, if Prussian law is applicable, this includes the special discriminatory provisions for Jews.\textsuperscript{123} His private international law remains a conflict between state laws, with no place for non-state law. Before private international law, personal alliance is to a state only.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} Savigny, VIII System § 346, p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Savigny, VIII System § 346, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Savigny’s most pronounced (and most-cited) statement about the Jew as stranger is in Savigny, Stimmen für und wider neue Gesetzbücher, 3 Zeitschrift für geschichtliche Rechtswissenschaft 1–52, reprinted in Thibaut und Savigny (supra n. 49) 231–254, 241: “Vollends die Juden sind und bleiben uns ihrem inneren Wesen nach Fremdlinge”.
\item \textsuperscript{120} On the question of Savigny’s purported antisemitism see, most recently, Thomas Henne & Carsten Kretschmann, Der christlich fundierte Antijudaismus Savignys und seine Umsetzung in der Rechtspraxis, 119 Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte – germanistische Abteilung (SavZ/Ger) 250–315 (2002).
\item \textsuperscript{121} See more generally Patrick Weil, Qu’est-ce qu’un Français? Histoire de la nationalité française depuis la Révolution (Paris: Grasset, 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{122} Savigny sometimes considers the Catholic Church as a State; see Savigny, II Geschichte des Römischen Rechts im Mittelalter, 261 f. (Heidelberg 1816). In his System of Contemporary Roman Law, the church is said to exist besides the state: Savigny, I System § 9, pp. 27 f.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Savigny, VIII System § 349, p. 36: a Prussian law prohibiting Jews to acquire land applies also to foreign Jews. The quote does not express a particularly anti-Semitic tendency; see also Henne & Kretschmann (supra n. 120) 310f. Contra (perhaps): Sturm (supra n. 38) 102.
\end{itemize}
III. Savigny’s System in Globalization

Summing up the previous section, the state is visible in Savigny’s concept of private international law in various ways. The state is relevant insofar as all private law is state law, and the state has the task to enforce private law. Sovereignty is largely irrelevant: the conflict of laws is not a real conflict, because the differences between private laws do not reflect clashes of politics; private international law is, in this sense, purely private and apolitical. Territory is of primary importance, because private international law answers differences between territorial laws; consequently the method of private international law is to determine the territorial “seat” of a legal relation, and to apply the (territorial) law in force at that place. Finally, citizenship is determined, for private international law purposes, through a territorial factor (domicile).

We can safely say that these four principles are still, by and large, valid in private international law. However, all of them are somewhat problematic in globalization. One reason may well be that the underlying conception of the state is no longer adequate. Jellinek’s definition of the state as “organization of sedentary people which has original sovereign power”\(^{124}\) turns out to be inadequate in all of its three elements.

First, people are no longer sedentary. We witness an enormous increase of mobility, partly due to easier modes of transportation, partly through public encouragement (“free movement of persons”\(^{125}\)). The state population becomes more hybrid. Second, and for somewhat similar reasons, the state territory loses importance – not because it is harder to define, but because, in times of transportation and internet, it becomes less relevant. Finally, sovereignty becomes relative, not only with regard to other sovereign states, but – more importantly – with regard to other powerful actors, especially supranational organizations, but also private actors like NGOs and multinational corporations.

These changes effect private international law as well. Some aspects shall just be mentioned. For example, not all law is state law anymore. We see a rise both of supranational law – the European Union being the prime example – and of non-national law, private norm creation.\(^{126}\) Choice-of-law rules could, theoretically, point to all kinds of rules, including non-state rules,\(^{127}\) but mostly they do not.\(^{128}\) At the same time, not all decision makers are state institutions. For example, arbitrators face choice-of-law questions as well.\(^{129}\) Nevertheless, the sovereign state, both as deciding institution (the judge) and as provider of applicable rules, still shapes the discipline’s character.

\(^{124}\) Supra n. 45.
\(^{125}\) Art. 61–69 EC.
\(^{126}\) For a criticism from a globalization perspective of Savigny’s position on this point (supra n. 56), see Gunther Teubner, The King’s Many Bodies: The Self-Deconstruction of Law’s Hierarchy, 31 Law and Society Review 763, 768 (1997).
\(^{127}\) Michaels (supra n. 55); Michaels (supra n. 63).
\(^{128}\) Kegel & Schurig (supra n. 37), 16–22, see also 109–111 (against application of lex mercatoria).
\(^{129}\) Thus, choice-of-law rules for (not sovereign) arbitrators are often shaped after judge-focused rules; see Dennis Solomon, Das vom Schiedsgericht in der Sache anzuwendende Recht nach dem Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Neuregelung des Schiedsverfahrensrechts, 43 RIW 981–990 (1997).
Furthermore, Savigny’s dream of a convergence of laws under the bond of Christianity has not come true – not only because non-Christian nations have become more numerous and important, but also because Christian nations do not, of course, agree on relevant issues. This leads to clashes because Savigny’s conception of an apolitical private law has proved to be an illusion in the 20th century. In fact, Savigny’s apolitical character of private international law is the one element that came under severe criticism early on. Now we seem to be watching a tendency back from a politicized private international law. However, this is not a step back to the situation Savigny faced. Savigny’s legal system contained clearly delimited public and private law spheres within the sovereign state. This state was strong in the public sphere, and (deliberately) weak in the private sphere. The political school of private international law urged the state to be strong in the private sphere as well. This step, radical as it looked, really only meant replacing one state element (territoriality) with another (state interests, sovereignty). In other words, the private international law process still took place within, and from, the state paradigm. The situation in globalization is different: the state is weak again in the private sphere (and beyond), partly from deliberation, partly from the pressure of globalization. The privatization of international relations, the competition of legal orders – all these are factors that disable the state and make its restrictions in the realm of private law more a function of necessity.

Also, determining a territorial seat becomes difficult in globalization, because territoriality has lost much of its meaning.130 This is due not only to the fact that the state’s power almost regularly extends “extraterritorially” – the Iraq war as a quasi-policing project is only the latest, and most obvious, example. Even irrespective of the state, territory is difficult to grasp: in the “global village”, borders lose significance, distances become irrelevant, markets transcend national boundaries, virtual spaces (like the internet) come into existence. Private international law can deal with this development in the sense that it will always be possible to determine certain territorial connections, but it may become questionable whether those connections actually make sense anymore.

Finally, the personal element is still in dispute. Whether nationality or domicile should govern questions of the person is still an open question.131 Yet the question may be too narrow, because it is still connected to state determinants. In a post-national age, peoples’ identities may have to be determined by more than just their nationality or their domicile, and a more adequate private international law might want to take these additional factors into account.


IV. The Statute of Corporations and the Überseering Decision

All of these points cannot be proven here. What can be done is to show how they influence the Übersee decision presented in the introduction, and how these changes may explain the mentioned “obsolescence of traditional private international law”.

1) The role of the state

The role of the state necessarily changes within the European Union. We can see this in Überseering in various ways. The most obvious is that the decision is based not on national (private international) law, but on European Union law, a supranational law. The relation between EU law and national law is in itself a conflict of laws, 132 albeit a special variant – vertical instead of horizontal – with special conflicts rules – primacy of EU law on the one hand, the subsidiarity principle 133 on the other. It tends to be overlooked that Savigny is aware of the possibility of such vertical conflicts; he is just not very interested in them. His solution is simple:

“While several laws are subordinate, one to another, the simple rule holds that the law has always the preference which has the narrowest sphere of application. The only exception to this rule is the case in which the wider law above it contains special provisions of an absolute and imperative character”. 134

A footnote invokes the adage “Stadtrecht bricht Landrecht, Landrecht bricht gemein Recht”. 135 We could translate this into the principle of subsidiarity 136 – and realize that the conflicts rule neither captures the primacy of EU law, nor the complexity of the relation. It is understandable, therefore, that the relation between EU and national law is not usually conceptualized as a conflict of laws.

2) Sovereignty and State Interests

This first aspect has an evident impact on state sovereignty: by transferring parts of their sovereignty to the European Union, the member states evidently have lost some of the monopoly on regulating their affairs. Yet we can also see a more specific impact on sovereignty in the decision. The German company seat principle is not a politically neutral conflicts rule, as Savigny might have conceived it; it sets out to ensure that certain standards would be upheld by corporations with their effective seat in Germany. 137 The

133 Art. 5 EC.
134 Savigny, VIII System § 347, p. 22.
135 Id., note (g). For the adage, see Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand, Deutsche Rechtsregeln und Rechtssprichwörter, 220, 310 (Munich: Beck, 1996). In practice (and in court), the principle was not as straightforward as it may look on its face; see Peter Oestmann, Rechtsvielfalt vor Gericht, 6 ff. and passim (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2002), with further references.
136 Art. 5 (2) EC.
incorporation principle (a fruit of the first wave of globalization\textsuperscript{138}), on the other hand, gives the founders of a corporation the effective freedom to choose the applicable law. It represents, therefore, a (deliberate) restraint of the state. By effectively declaring the German company seat principle irreconcilable with EU law,\textsuperscript{139} the Court of Justice strips the member states of an effective way of regulating corporations with an effective seat in their territories. The judgment enables corporations to choose the law applicable to them and thereby, so it is hoped, enables a regulatory competition between the member states.\textsuperscript{140}

Regardless of whether one favors or abhors such regulatory competition, it is an undeniable challenge to the classical concept of absolute sovereignty. Not only is the state no longer free to decide on the best policies and must instead bow to the pressure of the market. Moreover, such a regulatory competition suddenly moves corporations (and even individuals) from a subordinate to an equal position. Suddenly, they no longer have to obey state laws, but can instead play out one state’s laws against the other’s. The Europea Union disempowers the member state not only vis-à-vis itself, but also vis-à-vis its citizens. It thereby enhances a general trend of globalization, the growing power of individuals and corporations, especially multinational enterprises, relative to the state.

Yet \textit{Überseering} reveals an odder impact on questions of sovereignty. Effectively, Germany is obliged to recognize companies which have, under the law of incorporation, fulfilled all requirements. This could be explained by some kind of enforced comity owed to other member states, but it is even more reminiscent of the vested rights theory. Reminiscence of this theory – which Savigny rejects,\textsuperscript{141} is not accidental. In fact, a collaborator of the rapporteur in the Court of Justice expressly compares the solution in \textit{Überseering}, as well as an earlier decision\textsuperscript{142} to the “Anglo-American theory of vested
This invocation of a mostly discarded theory is somewhat odd. Not only is the territorial basis of the vested rights theory missing in Überseering – there need not be any territorial connection to the incorporation state, making the “vesting” a somewhat fleeting concept. Moreover, the criticisms Wächter pronounced are not answered. The second of these can be overcome: while one state cannot vest rights and then force another state to enforce these rights, a superior organization – the European Union – can. This is not really different from forcing states to enforce each other’s judgments. Yet the first criticism – the circularity of the vested rights approach – remains. Centros is a prime example: Denmark is asked to enforce the rights vested in Centros Ltd. under the law of England and Wales and therefore apply English law to it; yet these rights are only vested provided English law is applicable – a circular argument. Those authors criticizing the Court of Justice of circular reasoning are thus reaffirming a criticism that is almost 200 years old.

3) De-Territorialization

The result in Überseering – the demise of the effective seat principle – is also a step in de-territorialization. From the beginning it has been difficult to establish the territorial presence of a company, for the simple reason that companies are creatures of the law with no (necessary) physical existence, they exist by the law of its creation. The seat principle takes the company’s headquarters for the company itself and thereby re-territorializes the company. The principle ignores, for the purpose of private international law, the legal separation between the company and its founders and/or leaders. The incorporation principle, on the other hand, does not seek for any territorial connection – unless one considers the place of registration (if necessary) or the place of a post box (for so-called letterbox companies) a relevant territorial connection. Companies are therefore accepted to exist, at least before the law, independent from any territorial connection.

This is not only irreconcilable with classical private international law, but possibly with any private international law based on a state paradigm. As long as the state is by necessity territorial, such non-territorial aspects pose problems. If a company need not have any territorial connection with a state but can effectively choose the law applicable to it, why is it confined to state laws in its choice at all? Small states, especially tax havens, are likely to cater their company laws to such companies. Why should this be a privilege for states at

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144 The incorporation principle was, however, accepted by the vested rights theory.

145 Supra n. 72.

146 Savigny recognized this difference between conflicts within one state, and between laws of different states: VIII System § 348, p. 29.

147 EC Regulation 44/2001, Art. 33 (1); U.S. Constitution, Art. IV Sec. 1 (“Full Faith and Credit”).

148 Scoles, Hay et al. (supra n. 86), § 23.2, p. 1106 (2000); Daily Mail (supra n. 4), no. 19.

all? Ultimately, companies may be able to exist, by and large, outside the law of states. This may be desirable to those who do not trust states, but it is precisely for this reason that it presents a challenge to a private international law based on a state paradigm. These principles may not exist within the European Union, but certainly on a global level.

4) The Citizenship of Corporations

This problem may also be phrased in the terminology of citizenship. Centros involves Danish citizens who want to found a company that should be active entirely in Denmark. The company they found, however, is considered by the Court of Justice to be English. In what sense can it be said that such a company – after all a legal person - is a “citizen” of the United Kingdom? In which sense is Überseering a Dutch “citizen”?

The problem is of course that, on the one hand, corporations are not really “citizens” of any country, and that on the other, Art. 48 EC requires that companies “be treated in the same way as natural persons who are nationals of Member States”. The result is a kind of “citizenship” that is up for grabs for companies, freely selectable. Selectable citizenship is irreconcilable with concepts of 19th century continental law. It certainly does not reflect ideas about nationality, which traditionally require a certain allegiance (although some small states are now freely giving away nationality rights for a small fee). This makes it difficult to speak of the “nationality” of corporations. Yet it is even problematic for the less political concept of domicile, although this has been used for corporations frequently. Of course, Savigny was aware of the manipulability of his concept of domicile. But for individuals, changing domicile requires at least a considerable effort of moving. Such effort is unnecessary for companies that need only register in a state to become “citizens” of that state. If corporations are legal creatures, then they have no “domicile” either. In United States Law, citizenship, domicile, and nationality are defined through incorporation, but there is the awareness that this is a mere fiction. If European Union law accepts, on the one hand, that corporations are “creatures of the law”,

150 For a radical example, see Ralf Michaels, My Own Private Switzerland, 7 ZEuP 197–199 (1999).
151 See Peter Behrens, Das internationale Gesellschaftsrecht nach dem Centros-Urteil des EuGH, 19 IPRax 323–33, 326 (1999); Schurig (supra n. 10), 206.
153 For this reason, the U.S. Supreme Court used to deny the possibility of a corporation’s nationality; see Herman Walker, Provisions on Companies in United States Commercial Treaties, 50 Am. J. Int’l L. 373, 377 f. (1956) with references; but see E. Hilton Young, The Nationality of a Juristic Person, 22 Harv. L. Rev. 1 (1909); Heinrich Kronstein, The Nationality of International Enterprises, 52 Colum. L. Rev. 983 (1952); Comment, The “Nationality” of International Corporations Under Civil Law and Treaty, 74 Harv. L. Rev. 1429–1451 (1961). See also Kegel & Schurig (supra n. 37), 501: “Die juristische Person hat kein Heimatrecht”.
155 Savigny, VIII System § 346, p. 17.
158 Scoles, Hay et al. (supra n. 86) § 23.2, p. 1105 n. 8.
but on the other hand requires them to be treated like nationals of the member states – individuals – this mix creates problems.

V. Conclusion

Of course, determining the law applicable to corporations is not a problem brought about by globalization; it has existed as long as corporations have. Nothing new under the sun, therefore? It seems by contrast that the particular constellation of the private international law of corporations within the European Union reveals several problems for classical private international law, when faced with challenges that are, even if not always new, characteristic of globalization.

It appears from the foregoing that traditional private international law, if not necessarily "obsolete", is at least ill-equipped for globalization. It also appears probable that the problems stem from the field’s intimate connection with the state, a connection that becomes problematic once the state’s role in the world changes. Does that mean that traditional private international law is a dying species? Or can the discipline be adapted to the new challenges? Is it possible to supplant sovereignty, territory, and citizenship with factors that are adequate for globalization? It is not within the scope of this paper to explore these possibilities. Yet it is likely that such changes will be necessary if the discipline is to remain relevant in the future.