

War Series: Exhaustion of Remedies in Lessons from the Finnish Shipowners' War-Time Arbitration

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In the early 1930s, the arbitration case between Finnish shipowners and the British government over the use of certain Finnish vessels during World War I provides a rich field of study in international arbitration and the local remedies rule. This case, adjudicated in Stockholm, raises fundamental questions about the exhaustion of local remedies and the jurisdiction of international tribunals.

The Context and Claims

The case arose from the requisitioning of Finnish vessels by Russia during World War I, which were subsequently used by Britain. Finnish shipowners sought compensation, arguing that the British government had unlawfully used their property. The British countered that the shipowners had not exhausted all local remedies available in the UK, thus barring them from seeking international arbitration.

The Local Remedies Rule

At the heart of this dispute is the local remedies rule, which requires that claimants exhaust all available domestic legal avenues before turning to international arbitration. The British government insisted that the Finnish shipowners should have utilized the War Compensation Court and provisions under the Indemnity Act. They argued that these were adequate

remedies that the shipowners had ignored.

On the other hand, the Finnish government contended that pursuing these remedies would have been futile. They pointed out that the Arbitration Board had already determined that the ships were requisitioned by Russia. According to them, this ruling should be treated as **res judicata**, meaning the matter had already been adjudicated and should not be re-litigated in another forum.

Arguments Presented

During the hearings, both sides presented robust arguments. The British government acknowledged the finality of the Arbitration Board's decision but maintained that the shipowners could have appealed. They suggested that an appeal could have clarified whether the requisition by Russia was valid, thereby opening the door for claims based on British interference.

The Finnish government, however, argued that appealing would have been redundant and likely dismissed as frivolous. They cited principles of estoppel and **res judicata** to assert that re-litigating the same facts before another court would be unnecessary and legally unsound.

Requisition vs. Interference

A critical issue was whether the acts constituted a requisition by Russia or an interference by Britain. If the requisition by Russia was invalid, then the British use of the ships could be considered an interference, necessitating compensation under the Indemnity Act. The British government, however, maintained that their actions were legitimate, especially if the Russian requisition stood.

The Arbitrator's Decision

The arbitrator ruled in favor of the Finnish shipowners,

stating they had exhausted all reasonable local remedies. This decision was pivotal, affirming that seeking further recourse in the War Compensation Court would have been redundant and that the principle of **res judicata** applied.

This ruling underscored that the local remedies rule does not obligate claimants to pursue futile or redundant legal actions. It emphasized the need for claimants to demonstrate the ineffectiveness or inadequacy of local remedies convincingly.

Key Takeaways

1. **Exhaustion of Local Remedies:** This case affirms the necessity for claimants to exhaust domestic remedies but also clarifies that redundant or futile remedies do not need to be pursued. It highlights the balance between thoroughness and practicality in legal redress.
2. **Principle of Res Judicata:** The decision underscores the importance of **res judicata** in international arbitration, preventing the re-litigation of issues already decided by competent authorities. This principle ensures judicial efficiency and the finality of decisions.
3. **Complexities of Wartime Actions:** The arbitration sheds light on the legal challenges associated with wartime requisitions and the responsibilities of states in such contexts. It highlights the need for clear legal standards to address the use of private property during conflicts.
4. **Role of International Arbitration:** The case exemplifies the significance of international arbitration in resolving state disputes. It underscores the binding nature of arbitration agreements and the role of arbitral awards in providing definitive resolutions.

Conclusion

The arbitration between Finnish shipowners and the British

government serves as a critical reference point in international law and arbitration. It demonstrates the application of the local remedies rule, the principle of **res judicata**, and the legal intricacies of property requisition during wartime. This case continues to offer valuable lessons for practitioners, illustrating the necessity of exhausting local remedies and the pivotal role of international arbitration in achieving just outcomes.

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War Series: Arbitration and the Tax on War Profits

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On 15 June 1922, Gustave Ador rendered a significant arbitration award regarding the applicability of a tax on war profits, a decision that resonates through the corridors of international arbitration to this day. This case, arbitrated between the French and Spanish governments, addressed whether Spanish nationals residing in France were subject to the French law of 1 July 1916 on exceptional war profits or exempted by virtue of the Franco-Spanish convention of 7 January 1862. This award exemplifies the intricate interplay between **domestic tax laws** and **bilateral treaties**, a theme recurrent in modern-day international arbitration.

The Compromis Arbitral: Foundations of the Dispute

The arbitration agreement, or **compromis arbitral**, between France and Spain tasked the sole arbitrator, Ador, with resolving a critical issue: the applicability of the 1916 French tax law on Spanish nationals in France, against the backdrop of the 1862 treaty. The agreement underscored that Ador's decision would be final and binding, highlighting the **binding nature** of arbitral awards in international disputes.

Context and Historical Background

The 1862 treaty between France and Spain was a diplomatic effort to establish **mutual tax exemptions** for their nationals residing in each other's territories. This treaty aimed to shield foreign nationals from extraordinary taxes imposed during exceptional circumstances, such as war. Ador meticulously examined the treaty's intent and the historical context, which played a pivotal role in his decision.

Treaty Interpretation and Legal Principles

Ador's analysis revolved around the interpretation of Article 4 of the 1862 treaty, which sought to balance the **principle of domicile** with **nationality-based exemptions**. The treaty exempted foreign nationals from extraordinary contributions tied to their nationality, while subjecting them to ordinary taxes based on domicile. This distinction was crucial in determining the applicability of the 1916 tax law.

The arbitrator dismissed the restrictive interpretation that the exemption was solely for civil war scenarios. He argued that the **broad language** of the treaty did not confine the exemption to such a narrow scope, instead covering any extraordinary contributions arising from exceptional circumstances, such as the global conflict of World War I.

Nature of the 1916 Tax Law

The French law of 1 July 1916 was enacted to address the extraordinary economic gains made during wartime, imposing a tax on **exceptional war profits**. Ador emphasized that this tax was not a standard commercial levy but a response to the extraordinary economic conditions created by the war. He underscored the law's exceptional nature, aligning it with the treaty's provisions exempting foreigners from such extraordinary taxes.

Ador highlighted the **transitory and exceptional character** of the tax, noting that it targeted only the excess profits generated due to the war, distinguishing it from regular commercial taxes. This differentiation was pivotal in concluding that the tax law fell within the treaty's exemption clause.

Equity and Fairness Considerations

The award also touched upon the **equity arguments** presented by France, which contended that it was unfair for Spanish nationals to benefit from the war without contributing to the extraordinary fiscal burdens. Ador acknowledged these concerns but emphasized that any perceived inequity should have been addressed by renegotiating or denouncing the 1862 treaty, a step France had not taken.

He pointed out that the legislative debates in France, particularly the statements by French officials, reinforced the view that the extraordinary tax was linked to national solidarity and patriotism. This further bolstered the argument that the tax was inherently tied to French nationals, not foreign residents.

Implications and Contemporary Relevance

Ador's award is a landmark in the realm of **international arbitration**, illustrating the delicate balance arbitrators must maintain between **state sovereignty**, **treaty obligations**, and **equitable considerations**. The principles elucidated in

this award continue to influence contemporary arbitration, particularly in disputes involving **taxation and international treaties**.

The award underscores the importance of **clear treaty drafting** and the need for states to periodically review and update their international agreements to reflect evolving circumstances. It also highlights the role of arbitrators in navigating the **intersection of domestic laws and international obligations**, ensuring that justice is served while respecting the sovereign rights of nations.

In modern contexts, this case resonates in debates over **taxation of multinational corporations**, where treaties and domestic laws often collide. The principles of **fairness, equity, and the intent of treaties** remain central to resolving such disputes, making Ador's reasoning as relevant today as it was a century ago.

Conclusion

Gustave Ador's arbitration award on the tax on war profits is a testament to the enduring relevance of principled arbitration. It demonstrates the critical role of historical context, treaty interpretation, and equitable considerations in resolving complex international disputes. As we navigate contemporary challenges in international arbitration, the wisdom embedded in this award provides valuable guidance for balancing the interests of states and the principles of justice.

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