



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on the declaration of acceptance by the Member States, in the interest of the European Union, of the accession of Singapore to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

The aim of the Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (hereafter: "the 1980 Convention"), to date ratified by 86 countries, including all EU Member States, is to restore the status quo by means of the prompt return of wrongfully removed or retained children through a system of cooperation among central authorities appointed by its Contracting Parties.

As the prevention of child abduction is an essential part of the EU policy to promote the rights of the child, the European Union is active at international level to improve the application of the 1980 Convention and encourages third States to accede to it.

Singapore deposited the accession instrument to the 1980 Convention on 28 December 2010. The Convention entered into force in Singapore on 1 March 2011.

Article 38(4) of the 1980 Convention stipulates that the Convention applies between the acceding country and such Contracting States as will have declared their acceptance of the accession. Therefore, the European Union has to decide, whether to accept the accession of Singapore, and when affirmative, Member States should make the declaration of acceptance concerning Singapore's accession in the interest of the European Union.

As the matter of international child abduction falls into the exclusive external competence of the European Union, the decision whether the Member States should accept Singapore's accession to the 1980 Convention, has to be taken by means of a Council Decision.

2. LEGAL ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL

In accordance with the jurisprudence¹ of the Court of Justice, the matter of international child abduction falls into the exclusive external competence of the European Union, because of the adoption of internal Union legislation by means of Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 of 27 November 2003 concerning jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility ("the Brussels IIa Regulation")², which applies between Member States from 1 March 2005. The Regulation introduces even stricter rules than the 1980 Hague Convention on parental child abduction, in particular in Article 11 of the Regulation. It refers directly to the Hague Convention and upholds its principles in European Union law.

The 1980 Convention was adopted more than 20 years before the Brussels IIa Regulation and thus, it does not contain any provisions allowing the accession of International Organisations, like the European Union (the so-called REIO clause). In such situation, the Member States have to ratify or accede to the Convention in the interest of the European Union.

¹ Opinion 1/03 of the Court of 7 February 2006 on the competence of the Community to conclude the new Lugano Convention on Jurisdiction and the Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters.

² OJ L 338, 23.12.2001.

Therefore, the Member States should declare, in the interest of the European Union, the acceptance regarding Singapore's accession to the 1980 Hague Convention. For the sake of coherence and uniformity of Union law, this declaration of acceptance should be made simultaneously by the Member States within a time frame established by the Council Decision. The Commission proposes that the declaration should be deposited by the Member States no later than 2 months after the adoption of the Council Decision.

It is crucial for the practical application of the 1980 Convention that a Contracting Party designates a Central Authority required by its Article 6 to discharge the duties which are imposed by the Convention upon such authorities. All Member States have designated Central Authorities under the 1980 Convention. Singapore has also designated the Central Authority that is needed to assist the European citizens in cases of wrongful removal of children to Singapore.

Given the fact that the decision regards an international agreement, the applicable legal basis is Article 218 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union together with Article 81 (3). The Council shall act unanimously after consulting the European Parliament.

3. BUDGETARY IMPLICATION

The proposal has no implication for the European Union budget.

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THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 218 and 81(3) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament³,

Whereas:

- (1) The European Union has set up as a priority the protection and the promotion of children's rights, as stated in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union, and considers the prevention of child abduction an essential part of this policy.
- (2) The European Union has adopted Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 concerning jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility (so-called "Brussels IIa" Regulation), which aims to protect children from the harmful effects of their wrongful removal or retention and to establish procedures to ensure their prompt return to the State of their habitual residence, as well as to secure protection for rights of access and custody.
- (3) The Brussels IIa Regulation complements and reinforces the provisions of the Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (hereafter: "the 1980 Convention") which establishes, at the international level, a system of cooperation among central authorities aimed at ensuring the prompt return of wrongfully removed or retained children. In particular, Article 11 of the Brussels IIa Regulation takes over the rules and principles of the 1980 Convention.
- (4) All Member States of the European Union are Party to the 1980 Convention.
- (5) The European Union encourages third States to accede to the 1980 Convention and supports its correct implementation by participating, inter alia, to the Special Commissions organized on a regular basis by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.

³ OJ C , , p . .

- (6) The European Union stresses that a common legal framework applicable between EU Member States and third countries may offer the best solution of sensitive cases of international child abduction cases, where diplomatic channels and mediation fail.
- (7) Singapore has deposited its instrument of accession to the 1980 Convention on 28 December 2010. The entry into force of the 1980 Convention took place on 1 March 2011.
- (8) Article 38(4) of the 1980 Convention stipulates that the Convention applies between the acceding country and such Contracting States as will have declared their acceptance of the accession.
- (9) Pursuant to the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, namely the Opinion 1/03 of 7 February 2006 relating to the conclusion of the new Lugano Convention, the provisions of the 1980 Convention affect secondary European Union legislation on international child abduction and parental responsibility, in particular Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 of 27 November concerning jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgements in matrimonial matters and matters of parental responsibility. The matters dealt by the 1980 Convention fall therefore into the exclusive external competence of the European Union.
- (10) Pursuant to the 1980 Convention, only sovereign States may be party to it. Therefore, the European Union cannot accede to it, neither deposit its declaration of acceptance of the Singapore's accession.
- (11) Member States should therefore deposit their declaration of acceptance of Singapore's accession in the interest of the European Union.
- (12) By declaration, the Member States should accept, in the interest of the European Union, Singapore's accession in order to make the 1980 Convention applicable between the European Union and Singapore. It is desirable that its provisions be applied without delay, having considered the valuable contribution of the 1980 Convention to the protection of the child at the international level.
- (13) In accordance with Articles 1 and 2 of the Protocol on the position of Denmark, Denmark is not taking part in the adoption of this Decision and is not bound by it or subject to its application.

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

The Member States of the European Union shall deposit simultaneously, and no later than [ADD DATE: Two months from the adoption] a declaration of acceptance of the accession of Singapore to the Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction in the interest of the European Union as follows:

"[MEMBER STATE] declares that it accepts, in the interest of the European Union, the accession of Singapore to the Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction".

Article 2

This Decision shall enter into force on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Article 3

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council
The President