OPINION

of the Committee on Petitions

for the Committee on Legal Affairs

on the proposal for a Council regulation on jurisdiction, the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction (recast) (COM(2016)0411 – C8-0322/2016 – 2016/0190(CNS))

Rapporteur: Soledad Cabezón Ruiz
SHORT JUSTIFICATION

Among the numerous petitions received in relation to child welfare issues, many of them pointed out the shortcomings of the Regulation and/or the failures in its implementation. The PETI committee has a special interest in safeguarding the right of the child and we look for mechanisms to ensure that their problems and opinions are listened to, bearing in mind their vulnerability.

The proposed recast is aimed at enhancing children’s rights and in particular introduces a separate provision on the obligation for courts to give children the opportunity to be heard. It also aims to improve the efficacy of return proceedings following international parental child abduction and seeks to abolish exequatur proceedings for all parental responsibility cases. All of these issues have been raised in the petitions received, most of the time linked to situations where the non-national parent was, in practice, discriminated by the Member State having jurisdiction.

The rapporteur considers that the proposal has globally reached its aim and proposes interesting improvements. However, she considers that some changes should be made to the proposal in order to make it even more effective and offer a better protection of the best interests of the child and of EU citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms in general. By doing so, it will contribute to the further development of an efficient European area of Justice and Fundamental Rights.

AMENDMENTS

The Committee on Petitions calls on the Committee on Legal Affairs, as the committee responsible, to take into account the following amendments:

Amendment 1

Proposal for a regulation
Recital 3

Text proposed by the Commission

(3) The smooth and correct functioning of a Union area of justice with respect for the Member States' different legal systems and traditions is vital for the Union. In that regard, mutual trust in one another's justice systems should be further enhanced. The Union has set itself the objective of creating, maintaining and developing an area of freedom, security and justice, in which the free movement of persons and access to justice are ensured. With a view to implementing those objectives, the rights of persons, notably children, in legal

Amendment

(3) The smooth and correct functioning of a Union area of justice with respect for the Member States' different legal systems and traditions is vital for the Union. In that regard, mutual trust in one another's justice systems should be further enhanced. The Union has set itself the objective of creating, maintaining and developing an area of freedom, security and justice, in which the free movement of persons and access to justice are ensured. With a view to implementing those objectives, it is essential that the rights of persons, notably
proceedings should be reinforced in order to facilitate the cooperation of judicial and administrative authorities and the enforcement of decisions in family law matters with cross-border implications. The mutual recognition of decisions in civil matters should be enhanced, access to justice should be simplified and exchanges of information between the authorities of the Member States should be improved upon.

Amendment 2
Proposal for a regulation
Recital 10

Text proposed by the Commission

(10) This Regulation should not apply to the establishment of parenthood, since this is a different matter from the attribution of parental responsibility, nor to other questions linked to the status of persons.

Amendment

(10) This Regulation should not apply to the establishment of parenthood, since this is a different matter from the attribution of parental responsibility, nor to other questions linked to the status of persons. However, decisions relating to the exercise of parental responsibility taken on the basis of this Regulation should duly respect all forms of parenthood legally recognised in the other Member States.

Amendment 3
Proposal for a regulation
Recital 13

Text proposed by the Commission

(13) The grounds of jurisdiction in matters of parental responsibility are shaped in the light of the best interests of the child and should be applied in

Amendment

(13) The grounds of jurisdiction in matters of parental responsibility should always be shaped in the light of the best interests of the child and should be applied

**Amendment 4**

**Proposal for a regulation**

**Recital 17**

*Text proposed by the Commission*

(17) This Regulation should not prevent the authorities of a Member State not having jurisdiction over the substance of the matter from taking provisional, including protective measures, in urgent cases, with regard to the person or property of a child present in that Member State. Those measures should be recognised and enforced in all other Member States including the Member States having jurisdiction under this Regulation until a competent authority of such a Member State has taken the measures it considers appropriate. Measures taken by a court in one Member State should however only be amended or replaced by measures also taken by a court in the Member State having jurisdiction over the substance of the matter. An authority only having jurisdiction for provisional, including protective measures should, if seised with

...
an application concerning the substance of the matter, declare of its own motion that it has no jurisdiction. Insofar as the protection of the best interests of the child so requires, the authority should inform, directly or through the Central Authority, the authority of the Member State having jurisdiction over the substance of the matter under this Regulation about the measures taken. The failure to inform the authority of another Member State should however not as such be a ground for the non-recognition of the measure.

Amendment 5

Proposal for a regulation
Recital 18

Text proposed by the Commission

(18) In exceptional cases, the authorities of the Member State of habitual residence of the child may not be the most appropriate authorities to deal with the case. In the best interests of the child, as an exception and under certain conditions, the authority having jurisdiction may transfer its jurisdiction in a specific case to an authority of another Member State if this authority is better placed to hear the case. However, in this case the second authority should not be allowed to transfer jurisdiction to a third authority.

Amendment

(18) **Particular attention should be paid to the fact that**, in exceptional cases, *such as in cases of domestic or gender-based violence* the authorities of the Member State of habitual residence of the child may not be the most appropriate authorities to deal with the case. In the best interests of the child, as an exception and under certain conditions, the authority having jurisdiction may transfer its jurisdiction in a specific case to an authority of another Member State if this authority is better placed to hear the case. However, in this case the second authority should not be allowed to transfer jurisdiction to a third authority.
Amendment 6
Proposal for a regulation
Recital 23

Text proposed by the Commission

(23) Proceedings in matters of parental responsibility under this Regulation as well as return proceedings under the 1980 Hague Convention should respect the child’s right to express his or her views freely, and when assessing the child’s best interests, due weight should be given to those views. The hearing of the child in accordance with Article 24(1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child plays an important role in the application of this Regulation. This Regulation is however not intended to set out how to hear the child, for instance, whether the child is heard by the judge in person or by a specially trained expert reporting to the court afterwards, or whether the child is heard in the courtroom or in another place.

Amendment

(23) Proceedings in matters of parental responsibility under this Regulation as well as return proceedings under the 1980 Hague Convention should respect the child’s right to express his or her views freely, and when assessing the child’s best interests, due weight should be given to those views. The hearing of the child in accordance with Article 24(1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child plays an important role in the application of this Regulation. This Regulation is emphatically not intended to set out how to hear the child, for instance, whether the child is heard by the judge in person or by a specially trained expert reporting to the court afterwards, or whether the child is heard in the courtroom or in another place, but in order to protect the fundamental rights at stake, provision should be made in any case for the hearing of the child to be recorded. It is essential that the hearing of the child provide all guarantees necessary to allow the emotional integrity and the best interests of the child to be protected and, for this reason, such hearings should involve the support of professional mediators along with psychologists and/or social workers and interpreters. This would also facilitate cooperation between both parents and the relationship between them and the child at a later stage.

Amendment 7
Proposal for a regulation
Recital 26
(26) In order to conclude the return proceedings under the 1980 Hague Convention as quickly as possible, Member States should concentrate jurisdiction for those proceedings upon one or more courts, taking into account their internal structures for the administration of justice as appropriate. The concentration of jurisdiction upon a limited number of courts within a Member State is an essential and effective tool for speeding up the handling of child abduction cases in several Member States because the judges hearing a larger number of these cases develop particular expertise. Depending on the structure of the legal system, jurisdiction for child abduction cases could be concentrated in one single court for the whole country or in a limited number of courts, using, for example, the number of appellate courts as point of departure and concentrating jurisdiction for international child abduction cases upon one court of first instance within each district of a court of appeal. Every instance should give its decision no later than six weeks after the application or appeal has been lodged with it. Member States should limit the number of appeals possible against a decision granting or refusing the return of a child under the 1980 Hague Child Abduction Convention to one. Measures should also be taken to ensure that court judgments handed down in one Member State are recognised in another Member State. When a court judgment has been handed down, it should also be recognised throughout the Union, especially when the interests of children are at stake.
(28) In all cases concerning children, and in particular in cases of international child abduction, judicial and administrative authorities should consider the possibility of achieving amicable solutions through mediation and other appropriate means, assisted, where appropriate, by existing networks and support structures for mediation in cross-border parental responsibility disputes. Such efforts should not, however, unduly prolong the return proceedings under the 1980 Hague Convention.

Amendment 9

Proposal for a regulation
Recital 30

Text proposed by the Commission

(30) Where the court of the Member State to or in which the child has been wrongfully removed or retained decides to refuse the child's return under the 1980 Hague Convention, in its decision it should refer explicitly to the relevant articles of the 1980 Hague Convention on which the refusal was based. Such a decision may be replaced, however, by a subsequent decision, given in custody proceedings after a thorough examination of the child's best interests, by the court of the Member State of habitual residence of the child prior to the wrongful removal or retention. Should that decision entail the return of the child, the return should take place without any special procedure being required for the recognition and enforcement of that decision in the Member State to or in which the child has been removed or retained.

Amendment 10
Proposal for a regulation
Recital 38

Text proposed by the Commission

(38) In order to inform the person against whom enforcement is sought of the enforcement of a decision given in another Member State, the certificate established under this Regulation should be served on that person in reasonable time before the first enforcement measure and if necessary, accompanied by the decision. In that context, the first enforcement measure should mean the first enforcement measure after such service.

Amendment

(38) In order to inform the person against whom enforcement is sought of the enforcement of a decision given in another Member State, the certificate established under this Regulation should be served on that person promptly and before the first enforcement measure and if necessary, accompanied by the decision. In that context, the first enforcement measure should mean the first enforcement measure after such service.

Amendment 11

Proposal for a regulation
Recital 42

Text proposed by the Commission

(42) In specific cases in matters of parental responsibility which fall within the scope of this Regulation, Central Authorities should cooperate with each other in providing assistance to national authorities as well as to holders of parental responsibility. Such assistance should in particular include locating the child, either directly or through other competent authorities, where this is necessary for carrying out a request under this Regulation, and providing child-related information required for the purpose of proceedings.

Amendment

(42) In specific cases in matters of parental responsibility which fall within the scope of this Regulation, Central Authorities should cooperate with each other in providing assistance to national authorities as well as to holders of parental responsibility. Such assistance should in particular include locating the child, either directly or through other competent authorities, where this is necessary for carrying out a request under this Regulation, and providing child-related information required for the purpose of proceedings. In cases where the jurisdiction is in a Member State other than the Member State of which the child is a national, the central authorities of the Member State with jurisdiction shall inform, without undue delay, the central authorities of the Member State of which the child is a national.
Amendment 12
Proposal for a regulation
Recital 46

Text proposed by the Commission

(46) An authority of a Member State contemplating a decision on parental responsibility should be entitled to request the communication of information relevant to the protection of the child from the authorities of another Member State if the best interests of the child so require. Depending on the circumstances, this may include information on proceedings and decisions concerning a parent or siblings of the child, or on the capacity of a parent to care for a child or to have access to the child.

Amendment

(46) In special cases, when the best interests of the child so require, an authority of a Member State contemplating a decision on parental responsibility should be required to request the communication of information relevant to the protection of that child from the authorities of another Member State. Depending on the circumstances, this may include information on proceedings and decisions concerning a parent for example, in cases of domestic and gender-based violence, or on decisions concerning siblings of the child, or information on the capacity of a parent to care for a child or to have access to the child. The assessment of this capacity should be determined by a professional practitioner. The nationality, economic and social situation or cultural and religious background of a parent should not be considered as determining elements when deciding on the capacity to care for a child.

Amendment 13
Proposal for a regulation
Recital 48 a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

(48a) A support platform for Union citizens who are seeking the return of a child before courts in other Member States should be created. In addition, Union citizens residing in other Member States where they are seeking the return of a child should be assisted by their respective representations.

Amendment

(48a) A support platform for Union citizens who are seeking the return of a child before courts in other Member States should be created. In addition, Union citizens residing in other Member States where they are seeking the return of a child should be assisted by their respective representations.
Amendment 14
Proposal for a regulation
Article 7 – paragraph 1

Text proposed by the Commission

1. The authorities of a Member State shall have jurisdiction in matters of parental responsibility over a child who is habitually resident in that Member State. Where a child moves lawfully from one Member State to another and acquires a new habitual residence there, the authorities of the Member State of the new habitual residence shall have jurisdiction.

Amendment

1. The authorities of a Member State shall have jurisdiction in matters of parental responsibility over a child who is habitually resident in that Member State. Where a child moves lawfully from one Member State to another and acquires a new habitual residence there, as defined by the Court of Justice, the authorities of the Member State of the new habitual residence shall have jurisdiction.

Amendment 15
Proposal for a regulation
Article 7 – paragraph 1 a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

(1a) In order to simplify questions of competence, Member States shall designate a court at national level which shall deal with all cross-border cases involving children.

Amendment


Amendment 16
Proposal for a regulation
Article 12 – paragraph 1 – subparagraph 1

Text proposed by the Commission

In urgent cases, the authorities of a Member State where the child or property belonging to the child is present shall have jurisdiction to take provisional, including protective, measures in respect of that child or property.

Amendment

In urgent cases, the authorities of a Member State where the child or property belonging to the child is present shall have jurisdiction to take provisional, including protective, measures in respect of that child or property. Such measures should not
unduly delay the proceedings and final decisions on custody and access rights.

Amendment 17
Proposal for a regulation
Article 12 – paragraph 2 – subparagraph

Text proposed by the Commission

In so far as the protection of the best interests of the child so requires, the authority having taken the protective measures shall inform the authority of the Member State having jurisdiction under this Regulation as to the substance of the matter, either directly or through the Central Authority designated pursuant to Article 60.

Amendment

In so far as the protection of the best interests of the child so requires, the authority having taken the protective measures shall inform the authority of the Member State having jurisdiction under this Regulation as to the substance of the matter, either directly or through the Central Authority designated pursuant to Article 60. That authority shall ensure that the parents involved in the proceedings are thoroughly informed without delay about all the measures in question, in a language they fully understand. Accordingly, it shall be strictly forbidden to charge the parent from the Member State whose authorities have jurisdiction over the substance of the matter under this Regulation for the costs of translation.

Amendment 18
Proposal for a regulation
Article 20

Text proposed by the Commission

When exercising their jurisdiction under Section 2 of this Chapter, the authorities of the Member States shall ensure that a child who is capable of forming his or her own views is given the genuine and effective opportunity to express those views freely.

Amendment

When exercising their jurisdiction under Section 2 of this Chapter, the authorities of the Member States shall ensure that a child is given the genuine and effective opportunity to express his or her own views freely during the proceedings.
The authority shall give due weight to the child's views in accordance with his or her age and maturity and document its considerations in the decision. More particularly when the child is above 12 years old and clearly document its objective considerations in the decision. From the age of 16, the wishes of the child shall be considered as decisive. The authority shall create the right conditions so that the child can clearly and exhaustively express his or her own opinion, which shall be taken into account in the final decision. To determine the capacity and the degree of maturity of the child, assistance of professionals in child and family issues shall be sought.

Amendment 19

Proposal for a regulation
Article 23 – paragraph 2

Text proposed by the Commission

2. As early as possible during the proceedings, the court shall examine whether the parties are willing to engage in mediation to find, in the best interests of the child, an agreed solution, provided that this does not unduly delay the proceedings.

Amendment

2. As early as possible during the proceedings, the court shall propose mediation services, except in cases of gender violence, to find, in the best interests of the child, an agreed solution, provided that this does not unduly delay the proceedings. Where the parties agree to engage in mediation, the authorities of the Member State having jurisdiction shall ensure access to mediation services.

Amendment 20

Proposal for a regulation
Article 31 – paragraph 1

Text proposed by the Commission

1. The procedure for the enforcement of decisions given in another Member State shall, in so far as it is not covered by this Regulation, be governed by the law of the Member State of enforcement. Without

Amendment

1. The procedure for the enforcement of decisions given in another Member State shall, in so far as it is not covered by this Regulation, be governed by the law of the Member State of enforcement.
prejudice to Article 40, a decision given in a Member State which is enforceable in the Member State of enforcement shall be enforced there under the same conditions as a decision given in the Member State of enforcement.

Amendment 21
Proposal for a regulation
Article 34 – paragraph 2

Text proposed by the Commission

2. The court may, where necessary, require the applicant to provide, in accordance with Article 69, a translation or a transliteration of the relevant content of the certificate which specifies the obligation to be enforced.

Amendment

2. The court shall require the applicant to provide, in accordance with Article 69, a translation or a transliteration of the relevant content of the certificate which specifies the obligation to be enforced.

Amendment 22
Proposal for a regulation
Article 63 – paragraph 1 – point e a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

(ea) inform the holders of parental responsibility about legal aid and assistance, for example about specialised bilingual lawyers, in order to prevent holders of parental responsibility giving their consent without having understood the scope of their consent.

Amendment

Amendment 23
Proposal for a regulation
Article 64 – paragraph 2 a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

2a. Where a decision on matters of
parental responsibility is contemplated, the central authority of the Member State where the child is habitually resident shall inform, without undue delay, the central authority of the Member State of which the child is a national on the existence of the related proceedings.

Amendment 24
Proposal for a regulation
Article 64 – paragraph 5

Text proposed by the Commission

5. The authorities of a Member State where the child is not habitually resident shall, upon request of a person residing in that Member State who is seeking to obtain or to maintain access to the child, or upon request of a Central Authority of another Member State, gather information or evidence, and may make a finding, on the suitability of that person to exercise access and on the conditions under which access should be exercised.

Amendment 25
Proposal for a regulation
Article 65 – paragraph 1 a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

(1a) Social workers and other staff of authorities dealing with the cross-border placement of children in homes or with foster families shall receive training to raise their awareness of the issues involved.

Amendment 26
Proposal for a regulation
Article 65 – paragraph 1 b (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendment
Amendment 27
Proposal for a regulation
Article 65 – paragraph 4 a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

(1b) Member States shall guarantee parents right of regular access, except where this would jeopardise the well-being of the child.

Amendment

(4a) If the competent authority intends to send social workers to another Member State in order to determine whether a placement or adoption there is compatible with the well-being of the child, it shall inform the Member State concerned accordingly.

Amendment 28
Proposal for a regulation
Article 79 – paragraph 1

Text proposed by the Commission

1. By [10 years after the date of application] the Commission shall present to the European Parliament, to the Council and to the European Economic and Social Committee a report on the ex post evaluation of this Regulation supported by information supplied by the Member States. The report shall be accompanied, where necessary, by a legislative proposal.

Amendment

1. By [5 years after the date of application] the Commission shall present to the European Parliament, to the Council and to the European Economic and Social Committee a report on the ex post evaluation of this Regulation supported by information supplied by the Member States. The report shall be accompanied, where necessary, by a legislative proposal.

Amendment 29
Proposal for a regulation
Article 79 – paragraph 2 – point b

Text proposed by the Commission

(b) with regard to applications for enforcement pursuant to Article 32, the

Amendment

(b) with regard to applications for enforcement pursuant to Article 32, the
number of cases where enforcement has not occurred within six weeks from the moment the enforcement proceedings were initiated; number of cases where enforcement has been suspended, for how long enforcement has been suspended and the number of cases in which enforcement has not occurred within six weeks from the moment the enforcement proceedings were initiated;
**PROCEDURE – COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION**

| Title | Jurisdiction, recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction (recast) |
| Committee responsible | JURI  
  Date announced in plenary |
| Opinion by | PETI  
  Date announced in plenary |
| Rapporteur | Soledad Cabezón Ruiz  
  Date appointed |
| Date adopted | 24.4.2017 |
| Result of final vote | +: 15  
  --: 0  
  0: 8 |
| Members present for the final vote | Marina Albiol Guzmán, Margrete Auken, Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Soledad Cabezón Ruiz, Pál Csáky, Eleonora Evi, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Peter Jahr, Notis Marias, Marlene Mizzi, Cristian Dan Preda, Gabriele Preuß, Laurenţiu Rebega, Virginie Rozière, Josep-Maria Terricabras, Jaroslaw Walęśa, Cecilia Wikström, Tatjana Ždanoka |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Miltiadis Kyrkos, Julia Pitera, Ángela Vallina, Axel Voss, Rainer Wieland |
### FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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Key to symbols:
+ : in favour
- : against
0 : abstention