CHAPTER 4

The Legal Effect of Domestic Rulings in International Law

Theories which emphasize the incompleteness of the law usually argue that courts have a dual function: to apply law and to create new or revise old law. The prevalence of interpretation, however, seems to belie this view. Interpretation straddles the divide between the identification of existing law and the creation of a new one.816

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the legal effect of domestic rulings in international law. I argue that this effect is both static and dynamic.817 First, domestic courts enable States to respect their international obligations. They do so by enforcing international law domestically (infra, section 2). Second, from the perspective of the sources of international law, domestic judicial decisions also have a dynamic effect on international law, as they contribute to shaping it, on the one hand, and help interpreters ascertain it, on the other hand (infra, section 3).818 I explain my reasons for focusing on art. 38 ICJ Statute in Chapter 2, section 5 (supra).

Why highlight the legal effect of domestic rulings in international law? Simply put, because a normative argument about how domestic courts must interpret international law requires understanding the essence and characteristics of their activity, and its relevance and stakes. Joseph Raz has observed

816 Raz, Between Authority and Interpretation: On the Theory of Law and Practical Reason (n 78) 224 f.
818 On this issue, see Besson, ‘Human Rights’ Adjudication as Transnational Adjudication: A Peripheral Case of Domestic Courts as International Law Adjudicators’ (n 56) 48 ff.
that answering the question of how interpretation must be conducted (with regard to both legal acts and other interpretative objects) must start with an account of what interpretation is, and of why it is necessary and important (supra, Introduction, section 2).

Part 1 of this book revolved around the question ‘What is interpretation?’, and more precisely around the question: what is the nature and essence of domestic (especially Swiss) courts’ interpretation of international law? To answer this question, I have defined the scope of my inquiry (Chapter 1), laid its conceptual groundwork (Chapter 2), and provided context on the Swiss legal order (Chapter 3).

In Part 2, my goal is to address Joseph Raz’s second question – why interpret? In other terms, why is legal (and, more specifically, judicial) interpretation ‘central to legal practices’? As Raquel Barradas de Freitas notes, the word ‘central’ can designate the predominance of legal interpretation in legal practice, but also (and more convincingly) its instrumental role (ie, ‘its relevance to the pursuit of a series of ends’). The ‘why’ question is distinct from, and prior to, the question of how to interpret.

While I adopt Raz’s three-pronged structure of inquiry, my endeavor differs from his legal philosophical analysis of interpretation (supra, Introduction, section 2), and from his approach to the ‘why’ question. Instead of taking the perspective of an observer of the practice, as Raz does, I answer the ‘why’ question by analyzing the law as a participant in the practice. Unlike Raz, who looks at domestic law, my focus lies on international law.

As much of international legal scholarship confirms, it is tempting to understand Raz’s ‘why’ question as one that is about the ‘role’ of domestic courts.

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819 Raz, Between Authority and Interpretation: On the Theory of Law and Practical Reason (n 78) 223.

820 Barradas de Freitas (n 127) 45. See also ibid 273 ff. Barradas argues that interpretation plays an instrumental role in that it makes the exercise of legal authority possible. By making the law intelligible, it helps individuals understand what the law requires, and hence be guided by it. See ibid 278.

821 Joseph Raz states that understanding the importance of legal interpretation is necessary ‘to evaluate the different [philosophical] accounts of legal interpretation’ provided by legal theorists. See Raz, Between Authority and Interpretation: On the Theory of Law and Practical Reason (n 78) 225.

822 Weill (n 61); Sloss (n 120); Jonathan I Charney, ‘International Criminal Law and the Role of Domestic Courts’ (2001) 95 American Journal of International Law 120; Henry G Schermers, ‘The Role of Domestic Courts in Effectuating International Law’ (1990) 3 Leiden Journal of International Law 77; Falk (n 50); Bradley and Goldsmith (n 171) ch 2.
when they interpret international law. The term ‘role’, however, is multifaceted and ambiguous. A role can be captured from a descriptive or from a normative angle. It can be analyzed through the lens of domestic or international law. It can be defined from a legal perspective (i.e., by highlighting courts’ or States’ legal duties and authority), but also from a psychological or sociological perspective, etc. This role may differ depending on the source, norm, and substantive area of international law under scrutiny. Accordingly, scholarship addressing the ‘role’ of domestic courts in the interpretation of international legal acts is a thicket that is hard to penetrate.

A closely related point, and a distinctive feature of recent scholarly analyses, is that many authors adopt functionalist approaches. This should not surprise us in light of the aforementioned comments, since functionalism is an epistemic method that focuses on the role (or purpose) a given object serves – this role is deemed to have explanatory value. To illustrate, scholars have enumerated domestic courts’ modes of ‘engagement’ with international law, or the range of ‘functions’ these courts fulfill when interpreting it. Functionalist approaches have often been used by international lawyers, eg with regard to international courts, and they have also been popular in domestic law.

823 This observation has been made by Besson, ‘Human Rights’ Adjudication as Transnational Adjudication: A Peripheral Case of Domestic Courts as International Law Adjudicators’ (n 56) 45.
824 See ibid 45 ff.
825 See ibid 47 f.
826 Besides the sheer quantity of contributions that have dealt with this topic, the terminologies, taxonomies, and theoretical approaches used to analyze what domestic courts do, must do, or should do when interpreting international law are diverse and sometimes intermingled. For an overview, see ibid 45 ff.
828 Eg Weill (n 61) 179.
At first sight, functionalism is attractive because it allows us to draw a range of distinctions and to think analytically. Yet one important drawback of functionalism is its indeterminacy. How should we select among the myriad ‘functions’ courts perform? Why is one function deemed more important than others? Functionalism invites disagreement, as different functions are likely to be emphasized depending on the set of beliefs the scholar endorses. While purporting to be descriptive and analytically precise, functionalism substantially hinges on more fundamental value judgments.832

Rather than examining the ‘functions’ or causal ‘impact’ of domestic judicial decisions in international law, my aim, in this chapter, is to clarify why domestic courts’ interpretations of international law are central (ie, important, instrumentally relevant) to the practice of international law. In other terms, I examine the legal effect of these rulings in international law.

As usual, caveats apply. First, the two aforementioned aspects (ie, the law-applying, ‘static’ facet of domestic courts’ activity, versus its jurisgenerative, ‘dynamic’ effect)833 are two sides of the same coin.834 By enforcing international law domestically as international law requires States to do, domestic courts inevitably make law. Courts do so with respect to the relationship between domestic and international law, but also regarding the content of international law, subject to the framework established by art. 38 ICJ Statute. Second, in this chapter I am not yet evaluating domestic courts’ activity. My goal, at this stage, is to clarify the legal consequences of their rulings in international law. Third, I analyze this effect in general terms, without focusing on particular norms and domains of international law. However, the effect of domestic rulings varies depending on the norm and substantive area of international law at stake.835 Fourth, I focus on the effect of domestic rulings in international law. The effect of Swiss courts’ rulings in domestic law is addressed in Chapter 3 (supra). Fifth,
The way international law is received in domestic legal orders is contingent on domestic law (Chapter 3, supra). These features may limit domestic courts’ contribution to the sources of international law.

I now turn to the two legal effects of domestic rulings in international law, namely to their connecting (infra, section 2) and dynamic effect (infra, section 3).

2 Domestic Rulings as Means of Enforcement of International Law

A first legal effect of domestic judicial decisions on international law is that they facilitate the reception of international law in the domestic legal order. By enforcing international law domestically, they allow States to respect their international obligations (subject, of course, to the constraints established by domestic law in this respect, Chapter 3, supra).

International law, qua law, aims at being obeyed. This claim is implicit in all international legal norms, and explicit in some of them. For instance, the customary principle *pacta sunt servanda* codified in art. 26 VCLT provides that States must honor their treaty obligations. States cannot in principle rely on domestic law to justify a violation of these treaty obligations (art. 27 VCLT).836 States must also respect CIL and general principles of international law qua sources of international law (art. 38 ICJ Statute), unless these States are excluded from the scope of their legal authority.837

A State’s violation of its international obligations triggers its international responsibility. The conditions of this responsibility are exclusively defined by international law.838 The ILC’s Draft Articles on State Responsibility for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA), most of which are customary,839 provide

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836 See also PCIJ, case concerning the Greco–Bulgarian ‘Communities’, advisory opinion, PCIJ Series B No 17, 31 July 1930, 4, at 32. States cannot even rely on constitutional law: PCIJ, case concerning the Treatment of Polish Nationals and Other Persons of Polish Origin or Speech in the Danzig Territory, advisory opinion, PCIJ Series A/B No 44, 4 February 1932, 3, at 24; ICJ, case concerning Avena and Other Mexican Nationals (Mexico v. United States), judgment, ICJ Reports 2004, 31 March 2004, 12, at 65, para 139.

837 Eg if States are persistent objectors to a given norm of CIL, or in the case of regional custom.


839 Some ARSIWA provisions remain contested, such as those on serious breaches and countermeasures: James Crawford, ‘State Responsibility’, *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law (Online Edition)* (Oxford University Press 2006) 65 <opil.ouplaw.com>. 
that State responsibility arises whenever the State commits an internationally wrongful act,\textsuperscript{840} ie, an act incompatible with its international obligations.\textsuperscript{841} The decision of a domestic court is always attributable to the State, even when it exceeds the court’s competence under domestic law.\textsuperscript{842} Thus, if domestic rulings fail to respect the State’s international obligations, they trigger their State’s international responsibility and its duty to provide reparation.\textsuperscript{843}

One corollary of States’ duty to obey international law is their duty to apply and enforce international law domestically through their organs, so that international law can rule.\textsuperscript{844} International law is weakly institutionalized and lacks an international police force. Therefore, it must primarily rely on the State for its domestic enforcement.\textsuperscript{845} Exceptionally, international law defines the modalities of its enforcement, eg in IHRL,\textsuperscript{846} or in the context of remedies for breaches of international law.\textsuperscript{847}

States’ duty to obey international law may be expressed or reinforced by more specific positive international legal duties, rights, or powers.\textsuperscript{848} The terminology used in international law to characterize these duties or competences is diverse and often inconsistent (eg the duty or competence to ‘enforce’, ‘apply’, ‘interpret’, ‘implement’, or ‘give effect’ to international law, to ‘monitor’ its application, etc.), which makes it necessary to interpret each provision to

\textsuperscript{840} Art. 1 ARSIWA.
\textsuperscript{841} Art. 12 ARSIWA.
\textsuperscript{842} Art. 4, 7 ARSIWA.
\textsuperscript{843} PCtJ, case concerning the Factory at Chorzów (Germany v. Poland), judgment, claim for indemnity, merits, PCtJ Series A No 17, 13 September 1928, 4, at 29.
\textsuperscript{845} Even international judges play a limited role with regard to enforcement, see Besson, ‘Legal Philosophical Issues of International Adjudication: Getting Over the Amour Impossible Between International Law and International Adjudication’ (n 85) 425. Some international bodies monitor the domestic enforcement of international law. One example is the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which monitors the domestic enforcement of ECtHR rulings, see Samantha Besson, ‘Les effets et l’exécution des arrêts de la Cour européenne des droits de l’homme – Le cas de la Suisse’ in Bernhard Ehrenzeller and Stephan Breitenmoser (eds), Die EMRK und die Schweiz / La CEDH et la Suisse (Schulthess 2010) 160 ff.
\textsuperscript{847} ICJ, case concerning Avena and Other Mexican Nationals (Mexico v. United States), judgment, ICJ Reports 2004, 31 March 2004, 12, at 59 f, para 121.
\textsuperscript{848} Besson, ‘Human Rights’ Adjudication as Transnational Adjudication: A Peripheral Case of Domestic Courts as International Law Adjudicators’ (n 56) 47.
determine its legal implications. In some cases, international law explicitly requires or empowers States not only to give effect to their international obligations domestically, but also to interpret them.\footnote{849}{See ibid. The ECHR for instance is primarily interpreted by State institutions.}

The domestic judicial application and enforcement of international law is sometimes explicitly mandated by international law. IHRL for instance tasks domestic institutions, including courts,\footnote{850}{See art. 49(2), art. 50(2), art. 129(2), and art. 146(2) of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, respectively. On requirements of domestic enforcement in general, see Weill (n 61) 7 footnote 17.} with its enforcement. Other examples include ICC\footnote{851}{Art. 1 ICC Statute. See also art. VI of the Genocide Convention of 9 December 1948.} or IHRL.\footnote{852}{Eg art. 2(3) ICCPR. The UN treaty bodies have stressed the importance for States to grant judicial remedies, so that individuals can invoke relevant international human rights obligations. See the examples mentioned by Künzli, Eugster, and Spring (n 442) 4, note 6.} In international environmental law, access to courts is sometimes explicitly mandated.\footnote{853}{Art. 9 Aarhus Convention. The importance of judicial review is also stressed in soft law instruments, eg the Johannesburg Principles on the Role of Law and Sustainable Development adopted at the Global Judges Symposium on 18–20 August 2002.} The ICJ has occasionally required that specific measures be taken by domestic courts to guarantee domestic compliance with international law,\footnote{854}{ICJ, case concerning Avena and Other Mexican Nationals (Mexico v. United States), judgment, ICJ Reports 2004, 31 March 2004, 12, at 59 f, para 121. See also Fikfak, ‘Reinforcing the ICJ’s Central International Role? Domestic Courts’ Enforcement of ICJ Decisions and Opinions’ (n 63).} although domestic judges have sometimes shown resistance.\footnote{855}{A well-known example is the Avena/Medellín saga. On the other hand, some domestic courts explicitly underscore their State’s duty to apply international law domestically. The Swiss Federal Tribunal for instance, early on in its case law, emphasized the State’s duty to enforce international law through its institutions, eg BGE 49 I 188, at 3. The Court especially highlights judicial enforcement with respect to IHRL. See BGE 123 II 595, at 7 c); BGE 117 Ib 367, at 2 e).}

While some authors argue that international law increasingly imposes duties upon domestic organs,\footnote{856}{Ward Ferdinandusse, ‘Out of the Black-Box? The International Obligation of State Organs’ (2003) 29 Brooklyn Journal of International Law 45.} conceptually, it is the State’s (and not domestic courts’) international legal duty to respect international law.\footnote{857}{This is also how the ICJ phrased the issue in the case concerning Avena and Other Mexican Nationals (Mexico v. United States), judgment, ICJ Reports 2004, 31 March 2004, 12, at 60, para 121. See also Tzanakopoulos and Methymaki (n 217) 6.} States are free to choose the means by which to give effect to their international obligations. However, the nature and content of some obligations may require
that States take certain measures to ensure that their courts will give effect to international law.

States’ duty to abide by international law, and thus to implement it domestically and to act as ‘officials of international law’, explains why scholars highlight that domestic courts can, do, and/or should act as ‘enforcers’, ‘agents’, or ‘faithful trustees’ of international law. Scholars describe domestic courts as the ‘first port of call’ to adjudicate international legal issues and, when international adjudication is unavailable, as the first and only locus of international legal interpretation.

Of course, the State’s duty to enforce international law via its organs may conflict with other duties under domestic and especially constitutional law. From the perspective of international law, domestic law is no valid justification for disregarding international law, including its interpretative methods. In such cases, courts experience a ‘double bind’, as they must respect two


860 Nollkaemper, National Courts and the International Rule of Law (n 47) 8.


862 Nollkaemper, National Courts and the International Rule of Law (n 47) 11 f.


864 Art. 27 VCLT.

865 Nollkaemper, National Courts and the International Rule of Law (n 47) 14.
irreconcilable legal duties of the State. These conflicts faced by domestic courts have spilt a lot of ink, although it is important to highlight that in many instances, the conflict exists not only between international and domestic law, but also within domestic law.\textsuperscript{866} Scholars have highlighted ‘patterns of national contestation’ of international law, patterns which domestic courts contribute to tracing.\textsuperscript{867} Yet domestic courts also resolve conflicts by giving preference to what international law requires. In most areas of international law, contestation is the exception rather than the rule.\textsuperscript{868}

Existing scholarship on conflicts between domestic and international law is chiefly descriptive, in the sense that it primarily maps the existing practice and rarely examines how domestic courts must (or should) resolve conflicts. This question is complex, because the answer to it depends on the provisions at stake and, importantly, hinges on considerations of moral and political philosophy. The issue of how conflicts must (or should) be resolved is beyond the scope of my study, but my account has implications for how courts must handle such conflicts. The thesis I defend is that courts must use specific methods to ascertain international law (ie, textual, systematic, purposive and, if applicable, historical interpretation), and that they should strive to reason predictably, clearly, and consistently. They must do so regardless of how they resolve clashes between domestic and international law.

\textsuperscript{866} For an example, see \textit{BGE} 139 i 16.
States’ duty to apply and enforce international law domestically, including via their courts, is not the only reason why domestic courts’ interpretations are central to international law. First, from the perspective of the sources of international law, domestic rulings can collectively contribute to the formation and modification of international law (infra, 3.1). Second, from the perspective of any domestic or international interpreter of international law, domestic judicial decisions are auxiliary means (or ‘subsidiary means’, as per art. 38(1)(d) 1ICJ Statute) that assist her in her interpretative task (infra, 3.2). Of course, domestic rulings have an analogous effect in domestic legal orders (supra, Chapter 3, 4.2.7). They can even, under certain conditions and in some States, exercise domestic legal authority beyond the particular case. Yet in this section, I focus on the place of domestic rulings in international law.

While domestic and international law increasingly overlap in terms of their respective subject matters and of the authorities that apply them, international and domestic lawmaking processes remain distinct (supra, Chapter 1, section 6). Even this distinction is not as sharp as it might seem, however. The sources of domestic and international law are intertwined due to the fact that States have the power to collectively create international law. When two or more States conclude a treaty, for instance, they make international law. States also collectively provide evidence of the two constitutive elements of CIL, State practice and opinio juris. Furthermore, their acts can be a manifestation of the domestic recognition of at least some general principles of international law, ie, those applied in foro domestico. What differs between domestic and international law-making processes is that the latter involve States qua primary lawmakers.

The place of domestic rulings in the sources of international law is ambiguous in practice and in scholarship. While there is agreement (and rightly so) that domestic rulings are not a source of international law (infra, 3.1.1–3.1.3),

\[\text{869} \quad \text{Gross (n 844) 379.}\]

\[\text{870} \quad \text{Some courts explicitly reject the idea that domestic rulings do and/or should have legal authority (qua source) on the international plane: 1ICJ, ‘Public sitting held on Monday 12 September 2011, at 10 a.m., at the Peace Palace, President Owada presiding, in the case concerning Jurisdictional Immunities of the State (Germany v. Italy: Greece intervening),’ <www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/143/16677.pdf>, at 21, cited in Weill (n 61) 157. See also ICTY (Trial Chamber II), Prosecutor v. Zoran Kapreškić and Others, trial judgment, Case No IT-95-16-T, 14 January 2000, para 540, cited in Aldo Zammit Borda, ‘The Use of Precedent as Subsidiary Means and Sources of International Criminal Law’ (2013) 18 Tilburg Law Review 65, 69. Even national courts such as the UK House of Lords have}\]
their precise categorization is often left open (see also supra, Chapter 1, 2.3). Legal scholars and practitioners often mention that domestic courts ‘contribute’ to the ‘development’ of international law,871 or that they may ‘facilitate the determination of the contents of [international] obligations’.872 They consider that their rulings ‘may be relevant’ from the perspective of the identification of international law.873 The ILA Study Group on Domestic Courts notes that domestic courts, as organs of the State, necessarily affect the content of norms of international law whenever they engage with them. They serve as agents of development (or corrosion and decay) of international law norms.874 The role of domestic courts as ‘agents of development’875 of international law has been highlighted with regard to general international law (eg the law of international responsibility876 or the international law of jurisdiction).877

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872 Nollkaemper, National Courts and the International Rule of Law (n 47) 10.


875 Tams and Tzanakopoulos (n 147).


IHL, ICL, and IHRL. Scholars have also discussed the role domestic courts can play in ‘closing gaps’ in international law, for instance in the law of immunities.

Although most international lawyers acknowledge a de facto ‘influence’ of domestic rulings on international law, domestic judicial lawmaking is often obfuscated or presented as an oblique phenomenon. Hersch Lauterpacht has probably endorsed the boldest position in this respect, suggesting that their decisions are a ‘source’ of international law. Only few scholars use such forceful terminology. Apart from these exceptions, the reluctance to deem domestic rulings authoritative on the international plane likely goes back to the controversial nature of judicial lawmaking in domestic law (infra, Chapter 5, 4.2). Moreover, as previously mentioned, the entrenchment of domestic rulings in art. 38 ICJ Statute is equivocal. Finally, the effect of domestic courts’ interpretation on the formation and evolution of international law is not monolithic. It depends on the source of international law at stake, on whether the scope of a given norm is inter- or intrastate, on whether mechanisms of international adjudication restrict domestic courts’ interpretative freedom and, of course, on courts’ rights, duties, and authority in domestic law. Therefore, the effect of these rulings must be assessed carefully.

In this section, my goal is to show that domestic rulings, despite States’ and international lawyers’ reluctance to acknowledge it, contribute to the formation, modification, and ascertainment of international law. I analyze the legal effect of these rulings with regard to treaty law (3.1.1), CIL (3.1.2), and general

879 van der Wilt (n 871).
880 Besson, ‘Human Rights’ Adjudication as Transnational Adjudication: A Peripheral Case of Domestic Courts as International Law Adjudicators’ (n 56); Iovane (n 182).
882 Lauterpacht, ‘Municipal Decisions as Sources of International Law’ (n 50).
883 Hovell (n 871) 582, 591 ff. See also Jennings (n 40) 3 f. André Nollkaemper, in an article on ICL, assesses whether domestic courts are ‘sources’ of international law: Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182).
principles of international law (3.1.3). I also highlight the assistance domestic rulings provide to other interpreters in future interpretations of international law, pursuant to art. 38(1)(d) ICJ Statute (3.2).885

Of course, domestic rulings also constitute State practice in a different respect, on which I do not focus here: like every act of a State organ, they are attributable to the State for the purposes of international responsibility.886

3.1 **Domestic Rulings in the Sources of International Law** (Art. 38(i)(a)–(c) ICJ Statute)

3.1.1 Treaties

Art. 31–33 VCLT are widely held to codify the CIL of treaty interpretation (on this issue, see infra, Chapter 6). Of particular interest for the purposes of this study is art. 31(3)(b) VCLT, which states that ‘There shall be taken into account, together with the context [of the treaty]: […] b. Any subsequent practice in the application of the treaty which establishes the agreement of the parties regarding its interpretation’.

The ILC’s Special Rapporteur on ‘subsequent agreements and subsequent practice’, Georg Nolte, addressed the ‘legal significance’ of domestic case law in a report published in 2016.887 Nolte merely observes that domestic rulings qua subsequent practice ‘do not raise specific problems’.888 Indeed, given that such rulings are attributable to the State,889 they can, together with other instances of domestic and foreign State practice, constitute subsequent practice in the sense of art. 31(3)(b) VCLT.890 This constitutive aspect is arguably less central

885 See already ibid 49 f.
888 See ibid 37 para 96.
for treaty law than what is the case with cil, as custom cannot exist without its constitutive elements, namely State practice and opinio juris. This also explains why domestic judicial decisions are described by the ilc as elements providing evidence of State practice of opinio juris, contrary to the terminology that is typically used to describe the contribution of domestic rulings to the identification of treaty law and general principles of international law. Still, subsequent practice, when it exists, forms an integral, constitutive part of treaty law too.

This link between domestic rulings and subsequent practice is also reflected in the practice of international law. International criminal tribunals in particular have referred to domestic rulings qua subsequent practice, albeit not always explicitly. Two examples of implicit versus explicit references to subsequent practice mentioned by André Nollkaemper are the rulings of the ICTY Trial Chamber in Krstić and Jelisić. In Krstić, the Chamber referred to art. 31 f vclt when ‘look[ing] for guidance in the practice of States, especially their judicial interpretations and decisions.’ In Jelisić, it mentioned that it had ‘taken into account’ ‘the practice of States, notably through their national courts’ after citing the vclt’s treaty interpretation provisions. It referred (without providing any details) to the Eichmann ruling of the Supreme Court of Israel, as well as to judgments of Equatorial Guinean, Vietnamese, Ethiopian, and German courts. While the Chamber did not mention art. 31(3)(b) vclt in Krstić, it did note the relevance of domestic courts qua ‘subsequent practice’ in Jelisić.

\[\text{Draft conclusions 6(2) and 10(2), ilc, ‘Draft Conclusions on Identification of Customary International Law, With Commentaries’ (2018) UN Doc A/73/10 119.}\]

\[\text{ilc, ‘First Report on Subsequent Agreements and Subsequent Practice in Relation to Treaty Interpretation by Georg Nolte, Special Rapporteur’ (2013) UN Doc A/CN.4/660 18 f para. 41.}\]

\[\text{Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 280.}\]

\[\text{ICTY (Trial Chamber 1), Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić, Case No IT-98-33-T, judgment, 2 August 2001, para 541, cited by Nollkaemper, ibid.}\]

\[\text{ICTY (Trial Chamber), Prosecutor v. Goran Jelisić, Case No IT-95-10-T, judgment, 14 December 1999, para 61, cited by Nollkaemper, ibid 279.}\]

\[\text{Ibid, para 61, footnote 80.}\]

\[\text{Ibid, para 61. See also Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 280.}\]
The ILC commentary to the VCLT does not specify how subsequent practice is to be ascertained. However, art. 31(3)(b) VCLT makes it clear that domestic rulings reflect subsequent treaty practice if they establish the understanding of the parties. Hence, they cannot merely be a manifestation of the unilateral (auto-)interpretation of the treaty by one State. It is not necessary for the practice to express the understanding of all the parties, however, as the word ‘all’ was deliberately omitted by the ILC in the drafting process.\footnote{898}{ILC, ‘Draft Articles on the Law of Treaties With Commentaries’ (n 783) 222.}

International lawyers often limit themselves to general remarks as to the requirements this practice must fulfill to be relevant from the perspective of the VCLT, eg that it must reflect ‘a certain constant pattern of state conduct.’\footnote{899}{Hafner (n 889) 113.} To ensure predictability, clarity, and consistency in the way subsequent practice is ascertained, it seems helpful to interpret the notion of practice of art. 31(3)(b) VCLT in light of the notion of State practice in CIL. Like State practice in CIL (see also infra, 3.1.2), subsequent treaty practice must reach a minimal threshold of coherence (or uniformity), constancy (or regularity), and generality (or representativeness).\footnote{900}{On these three requirements: Besson and Ammann (n 60) 110 ff.} Otherwise, it cannot express the parties’ understanding. These requirements (coherence, constancy, generality) entail that domestic rulings, to constitute subsequent practice, must (i) not contradict the practice of other State organs (so that the practice is coherent), (ii) not be isolated rulings, but belong to an established practice, and (iii) emanate from the courts of a sufficiently large number of States. The requirements are even stricter for multilateral treaties.\footnote{901}{Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 280.} Of course, some differences with State practice in CIL do exist. Subsequent treaty practice pertains to the interpretation of written norms upon which the parties have previously agreed, and it must establish ‘the agreement of the parties’ (art. 31(3)(b) VCLT).

Assessing whether the aforementioned conditions are fulfilled indisputably involves discretion. International courts have not always been careful when ascertaining subsequent practice on the basis of domestic rulings.\footnote{902}{See ibid.} It is also important to note, along with Samantha Besson, that ‘the effects of domestic courts’ judicial interpretation on the interpreted norm [ie, on customary international legal norms and general principles] are greater than they are in the case of treaties’\footnote{903}{Besson, ‘Human Rights’ Adjudication as Transnational Adjudication: A Peripheral Case of Domestic Courts as International Law Adjudicators’ (n 56) 48.} because of the process through which these norms are
created and changed. This explains why domestic courts have been relatively neglected in the ascertainment of subsequent treaty practice. Nonetheless, domestic rulings can be constitutive of this practice and must be examined carefully.

3.1.2 Customary International Law

Besides reflecting subsequent treaty practice (supra, 3.1.1), domestic rulings can help determine (or, to use the ILC’s terminology, provide evidence of) State practice and/or opinio juris, the two constitutive elements of CIL. As previously pointed out, the contribution of domestic judicial decisions to the formation and evolution of CIL is more central than with respect to treaties (supra, 3.1.1) and general principles (infra, 3.1.3). Indeed, the very existence of custom depends on the presence of its constitutive elements. Treaties, by contrast, exist before a subsequent treaty practice develops. The absence of such a practice does not yield the conclusion that there is no treaty norm. As regards general principles, their domestic recognition does not suffice to establish their existence in international law, which must be determined through analogical reasoning. Moreover, some general principles of international law exist regardless of their recognition in foro domestico (on these two types of general principles, see infra, 3.1.3).

When do domestic rulings provide evidence of State practice and/or opinio juris in the context of CIL? The ILC’s recent work on custom shows that many aspects of the identification of CIL remain unsettled. Still, some are widely established. State practice and opinio juris must satisfy the requirements of coherence (or uniformity), constancy (or regularity), and generality (or representativeness). The terminology used to refer to these different requirements is

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904 Draft conclusion 3, ILC, ‘Draft Conclusions on Identification of Customary International Law, With Commentaries’ (n 891). The ILC notes that the term ‘evidence’ is to be understood in a broad sense, and that it does not refer to a formal procedure in which evidence is produced and assessed. See footnote 263, in ILC, ‘Report on the Sixty-Eighth Session (2 May–10 June and 4 July–12 August 2016)’ (2016) UN Doc A/71/10 84.

905 Art. 24 ILC Statute states the following: ‘The Commission shall consider ways and means for making the evidence of customary international law more readily available, such as the collection and publication of documents concerning State practice and of the decisions of national and international courts on questions of international law [...]’ (emphasis added).

906 Eg ILA Committee on Formation of Customary (General) International Law (n 886) 20 ff; James Crawford, Brownlie’s Principles of Public International Law (8th edn, Oxford University Press 2012) 24 f. See also draft conclusions 7–8 in ILC, ‘Draft Conclusions on Identification of Customary International Law, With Commentaries’ (n 891).
highly inconsistent, however, and the practice (both domestic and international) tends not to take them seriously enough (infra, Chapters 6 and 8).

The ILC cites domestic rulings among the forms of evidence of both State practice and opinio juris. The Special Rapporteur’s analysis of the authority of domestic rulings from the perspective of CIL is very brief, and he only mentions their relevance qua State practice. In 2016, the ILC’s Secretariat conducted a comprehensive survey of international courts’ reliance on domestic rulings to identify custom. Indeed, international courts such as the PCIJ and its successor, the ICJ, the ICTR, and especially the ICTY, have referred to domestic rulings qua State practice and/or opinio juris. Courts seldom distinguish between the two constitutive elements of CIL in this context.

907 For an attempted clarification: Besson and Ammann (n 60) 110 ff.
909 ILC, ‘Draft Conclusions on Identification of Customary International Law, With Commentaries’ (n 891). See draft conclusions 5, 6(2), and 10(2).
912 PCIJ, case concerning the s.s. ‘Lotus’ (France v. Turkey), judgment, PCIJ 1927 Series A No 10, 7 September 1927, 25 ff; ICJ, Jurisdictional Immunities of the State (Germany v. Italy; Greece intervening), judgment, ICJ Reports 2012, 3 February 2012, 99, at 122 f, para 55; 125, para 61; and especially 131 ff, para 72 ff; see also 141 f, para 96; 143, para 101.
914 As of 1 December 2015, the ICTY had referred to domestic rulings when identifying CIL in 49 out of 81 rulings: ibid 21, para 36. See also Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 281 ff. For references to domestic case law, see ICTY (Appeals Chamber), Prosecutor v. Dražen Erdemović, judgment, Case No IT-96-22-A, 7 October 1997, joint and separate opinion of Judge McDonald and Judge Vohrah, para 50 and 55; ICTY (Trial Chamber II), Prosecutor v. Anto Furundžija, judgment, Case No IT-95-17/1-T, 10 December 1998, para 194 ff; ICTY (Appeals Chamber), Prosecutor v. Duško Tadić, opinion and judgment, Case No IT-94-1-T, 7 May 1997, para 641 f (where the Court deemed French case law ‘instructive’, but of lesser relevance given that it concerned domestic law).
the ILC Secretariat notes, some never refer to domestic rulings when identifying CIL, eg the ITLOS\textsuperscript{916} or the WTO Appellate Body.\textsuperscript{917} Domestic rulings are typically one piece of evidence among others which courts use to determine the existence of CIL.\textsuperscript{918} The domestic practice also occasionally uses domestic rulings \textit{qua} evidence of the constitutive elements of CIL, ie, State practice and \textit{opinio juris}.\textsuperscript{919} Scholars accept this as well,\textsuperscript{920} although some emphasize State practice only.\textsuperscript{921}

Domestic case law is, of course, not the only basis for ascertaining CIL.\textsuperscript{922} When it is inconsistent, scarce, or not representative of a \textit{longa consuetudo}, other instances of domestic (legislative or executive) practice and/or \textit{opinio juris} may be used. The lack of domestic ‘judicial custom’\textsuperscript{923} is thus not necessarily the end of the matter with regard to CIL.

Should rulings that conflict with the position of the other branches of government be deemed an expression of State practice and/or \textit{opinio}? While some consider that what is decisive is whether the body at stake has the final authority on a given issue under domestic law\textsuperscript{924} (which is not always clear,\textsuperscript{925} see

\begin{addendum}
\item \textsuperscript{916} See ibid 18 f para 31 ff. However, individual judges of the ITLOS have done so, see ibid 19, para 34.
\item \textsuperscript{918} Eg ibid 24, para 39.
\item \textsuperscript{919} Besson and Ammann (n 60) 77 f.
\item \textsuperscript{921} IILA Committee on Formation of Customary (General) International Law (n 886) 18. See also the following statement of the IILA Study Group on Domestic Courts, in its 2014 Working Session Report: ‘The traditional position in international law is that domestic courts engage in state practice, and thus they effectively make international law, at least on a micro-level’. IILA, ‘Working Session Report of the IILA Study Group on Principles on the Engagement of Domestic Courts With International Law’ (n 61) 3.
\item \textsuperscript{922} Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 285.
\item \textsuperscript{923} Besson, ‘Human Rights’ Adjudication as Transnational Adjudication: A Peripheral Case of Domestic Courts as International Law Adjudicators’ (n 56) 63.
\item \textsuperscript{924} Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 284.
\item \textsuperscript{925} On the different approaches to conflicts between the judiciary and the executive, see Wuerth (n 920) 5, 10.
\end{addendum}
The Legal Effect of Domestic Rulings in International Law

Chapter 3, 2.1.2 and 4.2.2, supra), others give preference to the executive’s view. The ILA Study Group on Domestic Courts considers that domestic rulings, to constitute State practice and/or opinio, must be accepted (or ‘not “rejected”’, as the Study Group puts it) by the executive. The ILC, on the other hand, states that domestic judgments ‘will count less if they are reversed by the legislature or remain unenforced because of concerns about their compatibility with international law’. Yet it seems that especially when it comes to ascertaining opinio juris, ie, the fact that an act is performed out of a sense of legal obligation, judicial decisions should carry more weight than the acts of other State organs. Indeed, courts’ institutional position requires them to base their rulings on legally relevant (as opposed to strategic) reasons. It is worth stressing that this question arises if courts contradict the executive or the legislature, and vice versa, which is atypical in Switzerland (supra, Chapter 3, 4.2.2).

3.1.3 General Principles of International Law

Besides treaties and CIL, another source of international law consists in the ‘general principles of law recognized by civilized nations’ (art. 38(1)(c) ICJ Statute). The German translation of the ICJ Statute uses the term ‘Kulturvölker’. The term ‘civilized’ reflects an imperialistic view of international law. It needs to be deleted given the commitment of international law to sovereign

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926 ILA Committee on Formation of Customary (General) International Law (n 886) 18. On this question, see Wuerth (n 920) 3 ff.
929 Ingrid Wuerth suggests that courts’ institutional independence also justifies placing particular emphasis on their views to identify State practice: Wuerth (n 920) 19.
930 Eg ibid 9.
931 ILA Committee on Formation of Customary (General) International Law (n 886) 5.
932 It is worth pointing out that, conceptually, it is these principles’ recognition (qua social fact) that constitutes a source of international law, not the principle itself.
equality. However, proposals to amend the Statute in this sense have been unsuccessful.  

Unlike the ‘subsidiary means’ of art. 38(1)(d) ICJ Statute, general principles are a source of international law, but they are often considered of secondary importance compared to treaties and custom. They are deemed ‘gap-fillers’ that come into play when an issue is left open by other sources. General principles are of two types: some are idiosyncratic to international law (like sovereign equality), while others originate from domestic practices (like good faith). In the present study, the latter type of general principles, identified in foro domestico, is of particular interest.

How to identify general principles of domestic origin (ie, ‘general principles of law’, as opposed to ‘general principles of international law stricto sensu’) 

While general principles of this kind are ‘traced to state practice’, including to ‘judicial law’, it is important to note that this requirement of a practice of recognition is looser than the test applied to identify State practice and opinio juris in CIL. The existence of general principles of law primarily hinges on their recognition by States.

International courts (eg in ICL or IHRL) have identified general principles of law on the basis of national practices through analogical and/or comparative legal reasoning, although the methods they employ are not always transparent and comprehensive. Sometimes, they have used domestic court
decisions.\textsuperscript{941} In general, however, the \textsc{pci} and \textsc{icj} rarely apply general principles as a source of international law.\textsuperscript{942} The \textsc{icty} has been cautious in using domestic case law to ascertain general principles of international law. In \textit{Tadić}, it deemed reliance on ‘national legislation and case law’ justified only if ‘most, if not all, countries adopt the same notion of common purpose’. The court added that ‘it would be necessary to show that, in any case, the major legal systems of the world take the same approach’ to the issue at stake.\textsuperscript{943} Yet referring to so-called ‘major legal systems’ is problematic, as more weight is given to some States based on opaque criteria. As a matter of fact, Nollkaemper notes that the \textsc{icty} uses domestic case law selectively to identify general principles of international law.\textsuperscript{944}

To conclude, domestic rulings help determine States’ recognition of general principles of law. The weight of these rulings depends on how they fit with other domestic legislative and executive practices, analogously to what applies to \textsc{cil} (\textit{supra}, 3.1.2). The two-tiered test of State practice and \textit{opinio juris} used for \textsc{cil} does not need to be satisfied for general principles, which merely have to be ‘general’ and ‘recognized’ domestically.\textsuperscript{945} This does not mean that such principles can be invoked to circumvent the two-tiered test of \textsc{cil}.\textsuperscript{946}

3.2 \textit{Domestic Rulings as Auxiliary Means (Art. 38(1)(d) \textsc{icj} Statute)}

If in a given case, domestic rulings do not fulfill the criteria of subsequent treaty practice, State practice, and/or \textit{opinio juris} in the context of \textsc{cil}, or the domestic practice of recognition that generates some general principles of

\textsuperscript{941} \textsc{pci}, case concerning the \textit{Factory at Chorzów}, claim for indemnity, jurisdiction, \textsc{pci} Series A No 9, 26 July 1927, 4, at 31, cited by Gaja (n 934) para 9.

\textsuperscript{942} d’Aspremont, ‘The Permanent Court of International Justice and Domestic Courts: A Variation in Roles’ (n 240) 230 f; Besson, ‘General Principles in International Law – Whose Principles?’ (n 935) 39; Sienho, ‘Article 38 of the \textsc{icj} Statute and Applicable Law: Selected Issues in Recent Cases’ (n 73) 488.

\textsuperscript{943} \textsc{icty} (Appeals Chamber), \textit{Prosecutor v. Duško Tadić}, judgment, Case No IT-94-1-A, 15 July 1999, para 225. See also \textsc{icty} (Trial Chamber 11), \textit{Prosecutor v. Zoran Kupreškić and Others}, trial judgment, Case No IT-95-16-T, 14 January 2000, para 680; \textsc{icty} (Trial Chamber 11), \textit{Prosecutor v. Anto Furundžija}, judgment, Case No IT-95-17/1-T, 10 December 1998, para 177.

\textsuperscript{944} See, with reference to \textsc{icty} (Trial Chamber 1), \textit{Prosecutor v. Dražen Erdemović}, sentencing judgment, Case No IT-96-22-T, 29 November 1996, para 19; Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the \textsc{icty}’ (n 182) 289.

\textsuperscript{945} Besson, ‘General Principles in International Law: Whose Principles?’ (n 935) 60.

\textsuperscript{946} Pierre d’Argent, ‘Les principes généraux à la Cour internationale de Justice’ in Samantha Besson and Pascal Pichonnaz (eds), \textit{Les principes en droit européen / Principles in European Law} (Schulthess 2011).
international law (supra, 3.1), domestic case law may still be used qua ‘subsidiary means for the determination of rules of [international] law’ (art. 38(1) (d) ICJ Statute). I prefer to call them auxiliary means, for reasons I set out below. The use of domestic rulings qua auxiliary means pursuant to art. 38(1) (d) ICJ Statute by interpreters of international law stands on a different level than these rulings’ contribution to the sources of international law of art. 38(1) (a)–(c) ICJ Statute (supra, 3.1). While the difference is frequently blurred in practice, distinctive tests apply in these two contexts.

The uncertainties surrounding art. 38(1)(d) ICJ Statute and, more generally, the place of judicial decisions in the sources of international law, reflect the amour impossible between the orthodox doctrine of the sources of international law and the effect judicial decisions (both domestic and international) have in practice (supra, Chapter 1, 2.3). Given the practical significance of judicial decisions in international law, scholarly analyses of art. 38(1)(d) ICJ Statute are surprisingly scarce. International lawyers often mention the provision in passing, without analyzing the legal authority of domestic rulings.

International lawyers generally agree that ‘subsidiary means’ are conceptually distinct from the sources of international law listed in art. 38(1)(a)–(c) ICJ Statute. On the other hand, judicial decisions are sometimes qualified as an ‘indirect source’ or a ‘subsidiary source’. These expressions are

947 Nollkaemper notes that the ICTY has sometimes ‘endowed national decisions with an apparent quasi-independent authority that cannot be reduced to a constituent element of either customary international law or a general principle of (international) law’. Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 290.
948 Besson and Ammann (n 60) 69 f.
949 Eg ibid 80.
950 Besson, ‘Legal Philosophical Issues of International Adjudication: Getting Over the Amour Impossible Between International Law and International Adjudication’ (n 85). The expression was originally used by Ascensio (n 85).
953 See Zammit Borda (n 870) 68 f; Sienho (n 73) 491; Wolfrum (n 271) para 9.
955 La Forest (n 871) 98.
misleading: either something is a source of law, or it is not. ‘Subsidiary means’ are not sources, but material that assists decision-makers in ascertaining norms stemming from the sources of international law. The term ‘subsidiary means’ erroneously suggests a hierarchy or chronological priority between sources and ‘subsidiary means’, instead of acknowledging that the latter help ‘elucidate’ the former. Because judicial decisions are auxiliary means, they cannot usurp the authority of the ‘antecedent source’ of the law they ‘propound’. As noted by the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO), they are ‘no more than guideposts on the road to the destination, not the destination itself’. In this regard, the French version of the ICJ Statute is more precise than the English one, as it refers to ‘auxiliary’ means, ie, to means that are ‘offering or providing help’. Hence, the term auxiliary means seems more appropriate (see also supra, Chapter 2, 5.4).

While there are exceptions, most international lawyers consider domestic rulings to fall under the ‘subsidiary means’ of art. 38. This view is reflected in the ILC’s draft conclusions on CIL. It is supported by the fact that in the drafting process of the PCJ Statute, the initial reference to international judicial decisions was changed to ‘judicial decisions’. Moreover, especially in the context of CIL, international courts and arbitral

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956 See Zammit Borda’s statement that ‘subsidiary means’ should ‘supplement’ a given interpretation: Zammit Borda (n 870) 79.
957 Pellet and Müller (n 187) 944 para 305.
958 Crawford, Brownlie’s Principles of Public International Law (n 906) 41; Wood (n 14) 12.
959 Jennings and Watts (n 954) 41.
961 See the definition of ‘auxiliary’ in <www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/auxiliary>.
962 See also Pellet and Müller (n 187) 944 f para 306.
963 See ibid 953 para 323.
964 Hovell (n 871) 592; Jennings and Watts (n 954) 41 f; Higgins (n 365) 208. See also, for further references: Ammann, ‘The Court of Justice of the European Union and the Interpretation of International Legal Norms: To Be or Not to Be a “Domestic” Court?’ (n 143) 158, footnote 18.
965 Conclusion 13(2), ILC, ‘Draft Conclusions on Identification of Customary International Law, With Commentaries’ (n 891).
tribunals⁹⁶⁸ seem to use domestic rulings *qua* auxiliary means, even if they do not always explicitly say so.⁹⁶⁹ As mentioned, it is often unclear in practice whether such rulings are cited based on art. 38(1)(d) ICJ Statute, or *qua* element of determination of international law.⁹⁷⁰

The word ‘subsidiary’, according to André Nollkaemper, ‘reflects the fact that no formal system of precedents exists [in international law], let alone a principle of stare decisis’.⁹⁷¹ Absent such doctrines, however, interpreters are left with little guidance as to the weight of domestic rulings. Yet relying on domestic rulings in an erratic way stands in a tension with lawful, predictable, clear, and consistent judicial reasoning.⁹⁷² Domestic judicial decisions are not a convenient ‘shortcut’ or a “quick fix” solution.⁹⁷³ They are interpretative aids that should be used with ‘intellectual discipline’,⁹⁷⁴ not based on convenience or result-oriented cherry-picking.

International lawyers explain that in practice, judicial decisions are usually relied on ‘for their persuasive value’.⁹⁷⁵ Alain Pellet and Daniel Müller for instance write:

>[P]recisely as ‘there are awards and awards, some destined to become ever brighter beacons, others to flicker and die near-instant deaths’, there are judgments and judgments. Central to the question is the persuasiveness of the legal reasoning.⁹⁷⁶

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⁹⁶⁸ See ibid 7 para 13.
⁹⁶⁹ See ibid 16 ff para 28 ff. The ICTY too refers to domestic rulings *qua* auxiliary means, although it gives prefers to cite international rulings if they are available. See ibid 25 ff para 41 ff. The ICTR has occasionally used domestic rulings *qua* auxiliary means, see ibid 30 f para 47. On these two courts’ ‘wild approach’ to auxiliary means, see Cassese (n 951) 21 ff.
⁹⁷⁰ Besson and Ammann (n 60) 80.
⁹⁷¹ Nollkaemper, ‘Decisions of National Courts as Sources of International Law: An Analysis of the Practice of the ICTY’ (n 182) 291.
⁹⁷² Aldo Zammit Borda rejects the use of domestic rulings as a ‘direct source’, as they would be relied upon in a ‘lax, uncritical’ way: Zammit Borda (n 870) 66. See also Cassese 21.
⁹⁷³ See ibid 82.
⁹⁷⁴ Jennings uses this expression with regard to international rulings: Jennings (n 40) 10, 12.
⁹⁷⁵ Zammit Borda (n 870) para 7.
The notion of persuasive authority is frequently used in common law countries. Grant Lamond defines it as ‘non-binding but legally relevant considerations’.977 As Lamond explains, persuasive authority is a theoretical type of authority. It provides reasons to believe X, as opposed to reasons to do X, which is characteristic of practical authority.978

The notion of persuasiveness can be misleading. It can for example suggest that a decision is cited and followed in later cases simply because of its rhetorical force. Persuasiveness does not capture the fact that some judgments are cited in later cases (and hence have a legal effect beyond the particular case) because they are considered to offer lawful, high-quality reasoning. In this context, Samantha Besson’s distinction between decisional and interpretive authority is helpful. According to Besson, judicial decisions have ‘decisional authority’ for the parties to the dispute, but also, in some cases, ‘interpretive authority’ by guiding future interpretations of the law.979

In relation to this issue, it is important to note that the question of other interpreters’ (subjective) reliance on a given judgment (as authorized by art. 38(1)(d) ICJ Statute) is distinct from the question of the place of this judgment in the sources of international law (eg in international law, with respect to art. 38(1)(a)–(c) ICJ Statute, supra, 3.1). It also differs from the question of the (objective) legal authority of this ruling, be it vis-à-vis its addressees, in the legal order, or for a given court (qua precedent).

When should domestic rulings be used as auxiliary means pursuant to art. 38(1)(d) ICJ Statute? The answer partly follows from the two criteria I use to evaluate the practice of domestic courts (supra, Introduction, section 3). One criterion is courts’ use of the interpretative methods of international law, as it indicates that a decision was made in conformity with what the law requires. A second one is the quality of the court’s reasoning.980 As mentioned, the

979 Besson, ‘The Erga Omnes Effect of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights – What’s in a Name?’ (n 137); Besson, ‘Legal Philosophical Issues of International Adjudication: Getting Over the Amour Impossible Between International Law and International Adjudication’ (n 85) 420, 422. See also von Bogdandy and Venzke (n 174); van de Kerchove (n 799) 698.
predictability, clarity, and consistency of judicial decisions are indicators of high-quality legal reasoning. They suggest – but do not guarantee – that the interpretation was not reached on a whim, but after a careful, thorough examination. Third, domestic case law that is not well established provides scant support for a given solution. In this context, the requirements of coherence, constancy, and generality of State practice in the context of CIL offer guidance. These requirements are not decisive, however, and may need to be relativized when the case law on a given issue is limited. Fourth, domestic rulings that have been quashed or contradicted by higher domestic courts carry little weight, even if the requirement of internal consistency applicable in the context of CIL does not strictly apply to auxiliary means. By contrast, the warrant of rulings that have withstood the test of higher judicial instances is stronger. Fifth, the domestic context of the judicial decision must be taken into account, including the court’s jurisdiction, its composition, resources, and expertise (see also the criteria highlighted in Chapter 3, supra). These characteristics especially help determine whether the court’s reasoning is generalizable. Sixth, obiter dicta arguably carry less weight than the ratio decidendi.

While the aforementioned criteria are not exhaustive and do not offer hard and fast rules on when domestic rulings provide conclusive auxiliary means, they provide guidelines for this assessment.

4 Conclusion

I have argued that domestic rulings on international law are central to international law in two main respects. First, domestic courts, through their interpretations, can enforce international law domestically and avert their State’s international responsibility (supra, section 2). Second, they can (collectively) contribute to the formation and evolution of international law, and hence provide indications as to its content (supra, 3.1), and they can be used by interpreters of international law qua auxiliary means (supra, 3.2).

Since domestic rulings, besides having domestic legal authority (supra, Chapter 3, 4.2.7), are central to international law in these two respects, it is important to clarify the international legal frame that constrains domestic courts’ interpretations. Part 3 of this study is devoted to this question, which overlaps with Raz’s third question on interpretation, namely: how to interpret?