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**Draft Chapter  
on  
Plurality of Obligors and/or Obligees**

by

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE DRAFT**

This is a first draft of the future chapter of the Unidroit Principles on Plurality of obligors and/or obligees.

The proposals attempt to take into account the discussions which took place at the Rome meetings in 2006 and 2007. They have considered the solutions given by some significant earlier models, giving special attention to the corresponding provisions of PECL and the OHADA draft on contracts.

Earlier discussions are briefly summarized, with references to the Summary Records of the two Rome meetings (respectively « SR 2006 » and « SR 2007 »), and sometimes also to the Rapporteur's Position Paper for the 2007 meeting (Unidroit 2007 – Study L – Doc. 102, quoted as « Posit. paper »).

Commentaries on the proposals are not meant to be the future comments to be included in the final version of the chapter. Their mere purpose is to introduce further discussions on the draft provisions within the group.

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January 2008

## Section 1 : Plurality of obligors

### Article 1.1 (*Definitions*)

**When several obligors undertake the same obligation towards the same obligee :**

- 1) the obligations are separate when each obligor is bound only for its share;**
- 2) the obligations are joint and several when each obligor is bound for the whole obligation.**

#### **Earlier discussions :**

1. Plurality of obligors can include several situations. PECL, for instance, distinguishes between “*solidary*”, “*separate*” and “*communal*” obligations (art. 10:101).

1.1. The meaning and practical importance of the so-called “*communal*” obligations has been originally discussed (SR 2006, par. 155, 158, 161, 169, 170, 173, 174, 177, 181, 182). It was suggested not to deal with this concept in the black letters, considering that the circumstances for which it was designed are relatively rare. The Comments, however, could have something to say about such cases (Posit. Paper, pp. 6-10). Apart from a brief reference in the Rapporteur’s introductory presentation (SR 2007, par. 6), “*communal*” obligations were not discussed any more at the 2007 meeting.

1.2. Terminology was debated concerning the two other types of situations which the Principles will cover : each obligor bound only for its share (Situation One), or bound for the whole obligation (Situation Two) (SR 2006, par. 154, 155, 157, 159, 161, 163-167, 170, 176, 178, 182; SR 2007, par. 7-28). For the latter Situation, the term “*solidary*”, retained by PECL, raised objections from some members of the Group. On the other hand, while civil lawyers often take the expression “*jointly and severally liable*” as synonymous of “*solidaire*”, “*solidale*”, etc..., common lawyers make distinctions between “*joint*”, “*several*” and “*joint and several*” obligations. For Situation One, the term “*separate*” was also subject of discussions.

The Chairman of the Group recalled that “*as a general policy the use in the Principles of term of art peculiar to particular domestic laws did not mean that these terms should necessarily have the same meaning within the system of the Principles ... irrespective of the terms chosen it was up to the Principles to define the meanings of these terms autonomously*” (SR 2007, par. 9). On this assumption, it was decided to speak of “*separate*” obligations with respect to Situation One and of “*joint and several*” obligations with respect to Situation Two (SR 2007, par. 26-28). The respective meanings will be determined by the corresponding black letter provisions.

1.3. Some discussion also took place on whether joint and several obligations necessarily arose from a single contract. This was the opinion of several, but one member gave an example to the contrary (SR 2007, par. 17-19, 23-25).

1.4. Should there be an additional provision on separate obligations, next to the rules on joint and several obligations ? The definition of separate obligations already expresses the essential rule (each obligor is bound only for its share), but another provision could provide a default rule on how to determine the shares, such as in PECL, art. 10:103 (in principle, equal shares). After discussion, it was decided that there was not sufficient support for such a rule (SR 2007, par. 126-133).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

Article 1.1. defines the two basic situations of plurality of obligors the Principles are going to govern (so-called « communal » obligations will only be mentioned in the Comments), using the terminology adopted by the Group.

The provision refers to “the same obligation”, without specifying that this obligation should come from a single contract. Actually such additional requirement is never formulated in the different codifications which have been consulted (Civil codes of France and Belgium, art 1200; German BGB, § 421; Swiss Code of obligations, art. 143; Italian Civil code, art. 1292, Quebec Civil code, art. 1523; Dutch NBW, Book 6, art. 6; PECL, art. 10:101; OHADA draft, art. 10/7). It is suggested to state in the Comments that the obligation usually arises from a single contract, and to indicate examples of possible exceptions.

As decided at Rome 2007, no default rule has been included concerning the respective shares in separate obligations. (Apart from PECL, art. 10:103, such a rule also appears in some domestic codifications, such as the German BGB, § 420, the Dutch NBW, Book 6, art. 6, 1° and the Russian Civil code, art. 321).

On the contrary, after their definition in this article 1.1, joint and several obligations will be more extensively dealt with in the following provisions.

**Article 1.2** (*Sources of joint and several obligations*)

**[(1) When several obligors undertake the same obligation towards the same obligee, they are deemed to be jointly and severally liable, unless the circumstances indicate otherwise.**

**[(2) Joint and several obligations also arise when several persons are liable for the same damage.]**

**[(3) Joint and several obligations also arise when the promised performance is indivisible.]**

**Earlier discussions :**

1) If Article 1.1 defines two different situations when several obligors are either separately or jointly and severally bound, there has to be a default rule indicating which situation is applicable in case of doubt. It was agreed that in the commercial settings to which the Principles applies, the default rule should be in favour of joint and several liability (SR 2007, par. 29-30).

2) PECL, art. 10:102 (2) provides that “*Solidary obligations also arise when several persons are liable for the same damage*”. The Group discussed whether such a rule should also be included in the Principles. It was objected that such a provision referred to tort liability. Some possible applications were examined. The question was finally left open for the time being (SR 2007, par. 31-40).

3) The provision on indivisible performance has been suggested before (Posit. paper, p. 11), but it has not yet been discussed by the Group.

**Commentary on the proposal :**

1) According to the decision taken at Rome 2007, joint and several liability is the default rule for several obligors under the same obligation. PECL has adopted the same solution (art. 10:102, 1°).

There can naturally be exceptions to the default rule. While PECL resorts to the formula “*unless the contract or the law provides otherwise*”, it is suggested to use the expression “*unless the circumstances indicate otherwise*”, which already appears frequently in the Principles and which the Group adopted again at another occasion when discussing this chapter (see below, under art. 1.12). The Comments will of course indicate that the most frequent contrary “circumstance” will be a contractual provision excluding joint and several liability. Perhaps an example can also be given of a legal provision having the same effect.

2) Pending further discussion and a final decision by the Group, paragraph 2 has been left between brackets.

3) The proposed provision on indivisible performance as a source of joint and several obligations is also put between brackets, since it has not been discussed yet.

It is inspired by the OHADA draft, art. 10/8, itself inspired by the German BGB, § 431, the Dutch NBW, Book 6, art. 6, 2° and the Russian Civil code, art. 322, 1°. Other codifications have separate provisions on indivisible obligations (e.g. the French and Belgian Civil code, art. 1217-1225, the Italian Civil code, art. 1314-1320 and the Quebec Civil code art. 1520-1522). At least as seen from a Belgian point of view, those Civil code provisions on indivisibility are archaic and excessively detailed, especially since the effects of indivisibility are very similar to those of joint and several liability. It is suggested to follow the other legal systems which have merged the two sets of rules by making indivisibility of performance a source of joint and several liability. Subject to further discussion, we also feel that some of the situations examined when dealing with the concept of so-called “communal” obligations (see above, under art. 1.1) are cases of indivisibility, which could then be covered by the proposed provision. The Comments would of course provide examples.

However, while such an explicit provision on indivisibility can have much importance when separate liability is the default rule for plural obligors, it is perhaps less necessary in the system retained by the Group, where joint and several liability is the default rule. Indivisible obligations undertaken by several obligors would then *a priori* be joint and several, and the circumstances would most probably not indicate otherwise. This would be a reason not to have the proposed provision, but cases of indivisibility could still be mentioned in the Comments.

Comp. below, under art. 2.2 (plurality of obligees).

### **Article 1.3** (*Obligee’s rights against joint and several obligors*)

**When several obligors are jointly and severally liable, the obligee may require the whole performance from any one of them, until full performance has been received.**

#### **Earlier discussions :**

It was agreed that there would be a provision stating the main effect of joint and several obligations between obligee and obligors, i.e. that each of the obligors is liable for the whole performance towards the obligee and

that the obligee has an option to ask performance from any of the obligors up to the point where performance is total (SR 2007, par. 41-42).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

This provision is inspired by the language of PECL, art. 10:101, 1°. Similar provisions are found in all codifications (see for instance French and Belgian Civil code, art. 1200; German B.G.B, § 421; Swiss Code of obligations, art. 144; Italian Civil code, art. 1292; Quebec Civil code, art. 1523; Dutch NBW, Book 6, art. 7; Russian Civil code, art. 323; OHADA draft, art. 10/9).

**Article 1.4** (*Defences in general*)

**A joint and several obligor who is sued by the obligee may assert all the defences that are personal to it or that are common to all the co-obligors, but this joint and several obligor may not assert defences that are purely personal to one or several of the other co-obligors.**

**Earlier discussions :**

It was agreed that the rules on the defences which can be asserted by joint and several obligors against the obligee would start with a provision stating the general principles, as in PECL and the OHADA draft (SR 2007, par. 43-48).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

As suggested by some in Rome 2007, this draft provision is more inspired by the language of the OHADA draft. The Comments will obviously give examples of the different types of defences envisaged.

**Article 1.5** (*Performance, set-off and merger of obligations*)

**(1) Performance or set-off by a joint and several obligor or set-off by the obligee against one joint and several obligor discharges the other obligors in relation to the obligee to the extent of the performance or set-off.**

**(2) Merger of obligations between a joint and several obligor and the obligee discharges the other obligors only for the share of the obligor concerned.**

**Earlier discussions :**

It was agreed to include specific provisions on the defences related to performance, set-off and merger of debts, along the lines of the very similar PECL and OHADA texts (SR 2007, par. 49).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

Article 1.6 is inspired by the PECL and OHADA models, subject to terminological adaptations.

The Group will have to verify whether the expression “merger of obligations” (we have tentatively replaced “debts” by “obligations”, along the line of other provisions in the Principles – see for instance art. 6.1.12) is adequate, since the Principles, unlike the OHADA draft (art. 9/1 to 9/3), do not contain any provision on this cause of extinction of obligations. The French term would be “confusion”.

### **Article 1.6 (*Release*)**

#### ***Variant 1 :***

**(1) Release of one joint and several obligor discharges all the other obligors, unless the obligee has reserved its rights against them.**

**(2) In the latter case, the other obligors’ obligations are reduced by the amount of the release.**

#### ***Variant 2 :***

**(1) Release of one joint and several obligor discharges all the other obligors for the share of the released obligor, unless the obligee intends to release them totally.**

**(2) When the other obligors are discharged for the share of the released obligor, they have no more contributory claim for that share against the released obligor under article 1.12.**

#### **Earlier discussions :**

There was a lengthy discussion in Rome 2007 concerning the defences of release and settlement. Both PECL and OHADA texts, initially submitted as possible models, provide that when the obligee releases one of the joint and several obligors, or reaches a settlement with it, the other obligors are discharged only for the share of that obligor (unless the release or settlement extends to them). As between joint and several obligors, the released obligor is also released from its share. Some members of the Group felt on the contrary that release of one obligor should not affect this obligor’s “internal” liability vis-à-vis the other obligors, unless the obligee has released the other obligors for that internal part. Various opinions were expressed, and several examples discussed, including cases of settlement reached between the obligee and one of the obligors : should then the others be released by the full amount of the first obligor’s part, or only by the amount of the settlement ? It appeared to some that settlement and release needed to be treated separately, and that in any case one should distinguish between the external effects (relationship between the released or settling obligor and the obligee) and the internal effects (relationship between the released or settling obligor and the other obligors). Care should also be taken not to create disincentives to settle, though opinions differed as to whether certain proposed rules were incentives or disincentives.

This brief summary cannot fully account for all points made during this rich discussion : see SR 2007, par. 50-84. As a conclusion, the Rapporteur was asked to submit alternative approaches in the preliminary draft.

#### **Commentary on the proposals :**

a) Release

The hypothesis should be clearly defined. If the obligee releases all joint and several obligors, the obligation is fully extinguished. The problems to be solved here concern situations where the obligor releases one (or several but not all) co-obligor(s) for its (their) share(s) : what are then the consequences for (i) the non-released obligors' obligations towards the obligee and (ii) the non-released obligors' contributory claims towards the released obligor(s).

It has been pointed out that this introduces the notion of shares in the co-obligors' relationship with the obligee, a notion normally relevant only for the so-called "internal" relationship between obligors (SR 2007, par. 70). This is correct, but the obligee is often aware of the respective shares (even though joint and several liability gives it the right to ignore them), and it happens, under various circumstances, that an obligee wants to release one of the obligors without waiving its rights against the others; the notion of shares then intervenes in the "external" relationship.

The solutions provided by Article 10:108 of PECL (which mainly inspired the OHADA text, both provisions having initiated discussions at Rome 2007) do not represent "generally accepted" solutions, in spite of the opening statement made in Note 1 following Article 10:108. Actually, in codifications which deal with the effect of release of one obligor on joint and several obligations (not all of them have provisions on the issue), several very different solutions are present :

- Sometimes, release of one obligor discharges all the others, unless the obligee has reserved its rights against the others (French and Belgian codes, art. 1285, Catala draft, art. 1238, Italian code, art. 1301); in the latter case, the others' obligations will be reduced by the amount of the release.

- The same principle solution (discharge of all) appears in the German code, but phrased in different language : *"A release agreed between the obligee and one of the obligors also applies to the other obligors, when the parties wanted to extinguish the whole debt"* (§ 423).

- The Swiss Code of obligations is even less firm on the issue : *"When one of the joint and several obligors is released without payment of the obligation, its release benefits the others only insofar as circumstances or the nature of the obligation indicate"* (art. 147, 2°).

- The PECL and OHADA solution can be recalled here : release of one obligor releases the others only for the part of the released obligor.

- Then the Dutch solution is quite different : *"Renunciation by a creditor of his right to claim a debt from a solidary debtor does not release the latter from his obligation to make contributions. Nevertheless, the creditor can release him from his obligation to make contributions to a co-debtor by obliging himself towards the latter to reduce*

*his claim by the amount which could have been claimed in contribution"* (Book 6, art. 14). This implies that release of one obligor, in principle, does not affect the others' obligations towards the obligee.

In such a context, it would indeed be strange to exempt the released obligor from its contributory obligations in the internal relationship. But the situation is totally different if release of one obligor affects the others' obligations towards the obligee (total or partial release, as in most other systems described above).



It seems to us, upon reflection, that some of the doubts or objections raised in Rome 2007 were linked to different individual perceptions of what the basic rule was. Of course there should be coherence between the rules for external and internal effects (see SR 2007, par. 59).

Now coming to the proposals made above, our concern was to have a clear default rule – thus avoiding language immediately calling for interpretation (such as, in our view, the BGB and CO solutions). There appeared to be three basic possibilities : release of one obligor fully releases the others; release of one obligor releases the others for the part of the released obligor; release of one obligor has no effect on the others' obligations – each time with the logical consequences as regards internal effects.

Subject to the Group's further discussions, we feel that the third solution does not correspond to business parties' normal expectations : what is the interest of a release if its effects can be annihilated by the subsistence of a contributory obligation ? At this stage we do not submit a proposal along this third way.

Variant 1 provides that release of one obligor releases all others, unless the obligee has reserved its rights against them (first solution).

Variant 2 release of one obligor releases the others for the part of the released obligor, unless the obligee intends to release all obligors (second solution).

Whichever variant would be chosen would be a default rule. The respective logical consequences are attached as regards internal effects.

b) Settlement

See below, article 1.7.

### **Article 1.7** (*Settlement*)

**(1) Settlement offered by the obligee concerning the whole joint and several obligation is effective only towards obligors who have given their consent.**

**(2) If the obligee grants a settlement reducing the share of one obligor,**

- a) the other obligors' joint and several obligations are reduced by the full initial amount of the settling obligor's share ;**
- b) the other obligors have no more contributory claim against the settling obligor.**

#### **Earlier discussions :**

It has just been said, under draft Article 1.6 above, that there was a lengthy discussion at Rome 2007 concerning the defences of release and settlement. Some of the opinions and examples discussed concerned cases of settlement reached between the obligee and one of the obligors. Should then the others be released by the full amount of the first obligor's part, or only by the amount of the settlement ? Though PECL (explicitly) and the OHADA draft (through the use of broad language) cover both release and settlement in a single provision, it appeared to some members of the Group that settlement and release could need to be treated separately. Care should also be taken not to create disincentives to settle, though opinions differed as to whether certain proposed rules were incentives or disincentives (SR 2007, par. 56, 57, 62-64, 68-70, 77, 79-82).

### Commentary on the proposal :

If PECL explicitly refers to settlement to submit it to the same provision as release (art. 10:108), some other codifications seem to imply the same association through the use of broad language : see for instance the OHADA draft : “*when an obligee, by agreement, releases its rights against one of the solidary obligors ...*” (art. 10/10, 3°) or the Swiss Code of Obligations : “*if one of the joint and several obligors is released without the obligation being performed ...*” (art. 147, 2°).

The Italian Civil code stands out with a distinct provision on settlement (*transazione*) : “*Settlement made between the obligee and one of the joint and several obligors does not produce effects towards the other obligors, unless these declare their intent to benefit from it*” (art. 1304 par. 1). Remarkably, this solution is opposite to that which the same code provides for release, where release of one obligor in principle also releases the others (art. 1301).

In this context of joint and several obligations, can one assimilate settlement and release, or should one consider them differently ?

At first sight, a settlement that leads to a reduction of the amount due seems to be similar to a partial release, which could justify a common legal treatment. However, there is an important difference. A settlement is an agreement ending a dispute, where both parties usually make concessions. The reduction of the obligation granted by the obligee normally has counterparts; the obligor has also accepted to abandon or reduce some of its own claims. This means that reduction of the obligation through settlement cannot be treated as simply as a pure partial release.

A distinction should also be made depending on whether the settlement concerns the whole obligation, or only the part of one (or several but not all) obligor(s). The first situation is covered by the proposed Article 1.7, par. 1, the second one by Article 1.7, par. 2.

In the former case, since there are reciprocal obligations, the settlement can only be effective towards the obligors who have agreed to it. Contrary a possible solution for release (art. 1.6, Variant 1), the “benefit” of the settlement cannot be extended to all as a default rule. When there is such agreement, the whole joint and several obligation is reduced according to the terms of the settlement; the internal effects will of course be adapted accordingly.

If the obligee wants to settle only with one obligor, this can only concern the latter’s share of the obligation. That share will be reduced while the other obligors’ shares will remain unchanged. However, the global, joint and several obligation is necessarily affected by that settlement with one of the obligors. It has to be reduced, but by which amount ? By the initial amount of the first obligor’s share, or only by the amount of the reduction the first obligor obtained through settlement ?

Supposing that the settling obligor has paid the agreed amount, we feel that the others’ joint and several obligation should be reduced by the full initial amount of the settling obligor’s share. With the settlement with one obligor, the obligee has accepted to waive its claim to that full amount. It would be unfair that the other obligors would remain bound to pay that amount as part of the joint and several obligation. It also means that having paid the obligee, another obligor has no more contributory claim against the settling obligor; the opposite

solution would deprive the latter from the benefit of the settlement, for which it has itself granted counterparts to the obligee. This would clearly be a disincentive to settle.

*Illustration*

Obligee X has three obligors A, B and C, jointly and severally liable for 300. The respective shares are 3 x 100.  
 X reaches a settlement with A, in which X accepts to reduce A's share from 100 to 50. A pays 50 to X.  
 B and C's joint and several obligation is reduced to 200.  
 If B pays 200 to X, B can claim a contribution of 100 from C, but nothing from A.  
 A, of course, has no claim against B and C for the 50 paid to X.

**Article 1.8** (*Waiver of joint and several liability*)

**An obligee who waives joint and several liability in favour of one of the obligors retains its joint and several claim against the other obligors for the whole obligation.**

**Earlier discussions :**

Both PECL and the OHADA draft provide that an obligee who renounces "solidarity" in favour of one of the obligors retains its "solidary" remedy against the other obligors for the whole debt. Opinions were divided in Rome 2007 concerning the utility of such a provision, in the light of what could be decided as to the effects of release of one co-obligor. It was considered premature to take a final stand on whether a special provision on waiver of solidarity was needed until a decision was taken on release (SR 2007, par. 85-92).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

Waiver of joint and several liability means that the obligee will not treat the beneficiary as a joint and several obligor, but will only claim the latter's share of the obligation.

Upon reflection, we believe the respective rules on release and waiver of joint and several liability are not interfering with each other. The two situations are very different.

When an obligee releases one of the obligors, either the other obligees are also released (Article 1.7, Variant 1) or they are discharged for the share of the released obligor (Variant 2). In either case, the released obligor has no more obligation, and waiver of joint and several liability in its favour would make no sense. Even in the third possibility, which it is suggested not to retain (see above, commentary to Article 1.7), where the released obligor is still bound to contribute, this concerns the relationship between the released obligor and the other obligors; the obligee has no more claim against the obligor it has released, so here again, waiver of joint and several liability would make no sense.

On the contrary, when an obligor benefits from a waiver of joint and several liability, it is still bound to pay its share to the obligee. But it means that the obligee will no longer be entitled to claim the whole obligation from this obligor. The question is thus relevant to decide whether this waiver granted in favour of one obligor also benefits the others or not.

The proposed text follows the OHADA model, itself inspired by similar provisions in the Civil codes of Québec (art. 1532) and Italy (art. 1311). France and Belgium (art. 1210-1212) also have provisions on waiver of

solidarity, but with a difference : the other obligors remain jointly and severally bound, but with the deduction of the first obligor's part.

*Illustration :*

Obligee X has three obligors A, B and C, jointly and severally liable for 300. The respective shares are 3 x 100.  
 X waives joint and several liability in favour of A.  
 X can now claim only 100 from A, but still 300 from both B and C.  
 If A pays 100 to X, it has no claim against the other obligors, who each remain jointly and severally bound for 200 towards X.  
 If B pays 300 to X, it has contributory claims of 100 against both A and C.

**Article 1.9** (*Expiration of limitation period*)

**Expiration of the limitation period of the obligee's rights against one joint and several obligor does not affect:**

- (a) the obligations to the obligee of the other joint and several obligors; or**
- (b) the rights of recourse between the joint and several obligors under article 1.12.**

**Earlier discussions :**

There was little discussion of this issue. When the PECL model (art. 10:110) was submitted, a member of the Group found the rule "*self-evident and therefore superfluous*", but could nevertheless accept (SR 2007, par. 93-94).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

The general issue of the effect of the expiration of the limitation period benefiting one joint and several obligor on the other obligors' rights and obligations is also touched by the German B.G.B. (§ 425 : in principle, effects only for the obligor concerned). The Dutch N.B.W. has a provision concerning contributory claims (Book 6, art. 11 : an obligor asked to pay its contributory share can invoke limitation of the obligee's claim only if at the moment the obligation to contribute arose, both itself and the claiming co-obligor could have invoked such limitation).

Since the PECL provision had met no opposition, though it had not really been discussed at Rome 2007, a draft article inspired by it is submitted to the Group.

**Article 1.10** (*Effect of judgment*)

**A decision by a court as to the liability to the obligee of one joint and several obligor does not affect:**

- (a) the obligations to the obligee of the other joint and several obligors; or**
- (b) the rights of recourse between the joint and several obligors under article 1.12.**

**Earlier discussions :**

The PECL model (art. 10:109) raised no objection at Rome 2007 (SR 2007, par. 95).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

A draft article inspired by the corresponding PECL provision is submitted to the Group.

\* \* \*

***Death of an obligor – Winding up or splitting of a company*****Earlier discussions and commentary**

*Some codifications consider the effect of the death of an obligor on its joint and several obligation, generally to provide that the obligation is in principle divided between the heirs. Two examples were submitted to the Group at Rome 2007 (Quebec Civil code, art. 1540; OHADA draft, art. 10/12; also see Italian civil code, art. 1295; French and Belgian Civil code, art. 1213). It was felt that such a provision would not be advisable in Principles governing international commercial contracts (SR 2007, par. 95) ; consequently it has not been included in the present draft.*

*The suggestion was made instead to contemplate cases of winding up and of splitting of companies. It was however objected that dealing with such matters would inevitably bring company law into play, which was for a number of reasons inadvisable (SR 2007, par. 95).*

*Upon reflection, this is also the Rapporteur's feeling, and no draft provision has been prepared at this stage.*

\* \* \*

**Article 1.11 (Apportionment between joint and several obligors)**

**[(1)] As between themselves, joint and several obligors are liable in equal shares unless the circumstances indicate otherwise.**

**[(2) If two or more debtors are liable for the same damage under article 1.2, 2°, their share of liability as between themselves is determined according to the law governing the event which gave rise to the liability.]**

**Earlier discussions :**

The corresponding PECL (art. 10:105) and OHADA (art. 10/11, 1) provisions were examined at Rome 2007 and inspired only one suggestion, to delete any reference to “*the law*” and to use the formula “*under the circumstances indicate otherwise*” (SR 2007, par. 98-103).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

The provision proposed in the first paragraph follows Rome 2007. This solution, that as between themselves, joint and several obligors are in principle liable in equal shares, is also adopted by several other codifications, such as the German B.G.B. (§ 426), the Swiss Code of obligations (art. 148), the Italian Civil code (art. 1299), the Quebec Civil code (art. 1537) and the Russian Civil code (art. 325). Other codifications just refer to the respective shares, without presuming them to be equal (cf. French and Belgian Civil code, art. 1213, Dutch NBW, Book 6, art. 10, 1°).

A presumption that the respective shares are equal appears to be useful in case of doubt; indications to the contrary can always be taken into consideration.

A specific situation should be mentioned where precisely, circumstances would indicate another apportionment between obligors. It frequently happens that a person accepted to become jointly and severally bound with another, not because it had itself an interest in the obligation, but in order to provide security for the “main” obligor’s obligation. This situation is covered by some codifications, such as the French and Belgian Civil code (art. 1216), the Italian Civil code (art. 1298) or the Quebec Civil code (art. 1537 par. 2). In such circumstances, if the “intervening” obligor has paid the obligee, it can claim reimbursement of the whole amount from the “main” obligor.

One could envisage to include a distinct provision on this situation. One could also consider that it is adequately covered by the formula “*unless the circumstances indicate otherwise*”, but give it as a typical illustration in the Comments.

Paragraph 2 is between brackets. Its existence depends on the decision that will be taken concerning article 1.2, 2° above (joint and several liability for liability of several persons for the same damage).

### **Article 1.12** (*Extent of contributory claim*)

**A joint and several obligor who has performed more than its share may claim the excess from any of the other obligors to the extent of each obligor's unperformed share [, together with a share of any costs reasonably incurred].**

#### **Earlier discussions :**

The corresponding PECL provision (art. 10:106,1°) was examined at Rome 2007. Some felt that it was self-evident or at least implicit in the equal shares principles just adopted (see above art. 1.12), but others disagreed and considered that such a rule was necessary. One member suggested to delete the last part concerning costs, fearing it could give rise to litigation (SR 2007, par. 104-108).

#### **Commentary on the proposal :**

A similar basic rule on contributory recourse appears in many codifications, such as the French and Belgian Civil code (art. 1214), the Swiss Code of obligations (art. 148, 2°), the Italian Civil code (art. 1299), the Dutch NBW (Book 6, art. 10, 2°) or the Quebec Civil code (art. 1536). We suggest to have one in the Principles. The provision on the respective shares may be interpreted as implying the possibility of contributory recourse, but we feel this is such an important feature of the system of joint and several obligations that it should be explicitly stated.

Since the objection to the last part concerning costs has not been discussed, we have left this part between brackets. A similar provision appears in the Dutch NBW (Book 6, art. 10, 3°).

### **Article 1.13** (*Rights and actions of the obligee*)

**A joint and several obligor to whom article 1.13 applies may also exercise the rights and actions of the obligee, including accessory securities, to recover the excess from any of the other obligors to the extent of each obligor’s unperformed share.**

**Earlier discussions :**

The discussion was very brief when the corresponding provisions of PECL (art. 10:106, 2°) and OHADA (art. 10/11, 3°) were submitted at Rome 2007. One member favoured having such a rule.

**Commentary on the proposal :**

Such a rule also frequently appears in other codifications, such as the French and Belgian Civil code (art. 1251, 3°), the German BGB (§ 426, 2°), the Swiss Code of obligations (art. 149, 1°), the Italian Civil code (art. 1303, 3°), the Dutch NBW (Book 6, art. 12) or the Quebec Civil code (art. 1656, 3°).

Subject to further discussion, we have included the rule in the draft.

**Article 1.14** (*Defences*)

**A joint and several obligor sued for reimbursement by the co-obligor who has performed the obligation may raise any common defences that have not been asserted by the co-obligor against the obligee ; it may also assert defences which are personal to itself, but not those which are purely personal to one or several of the other co-obligors.**

**Earlier discussions :**

Article 10/11, 4° of the OHADA draft, which served as a model for the proposed Article 1.14, was discussed at Rome 2007. Several clarifications were given. The text deals with defences against the obligee, not any defences that may exist between co-obligors. One member felt uneasy to think that the proposed rule would enable the obligee not only to choose the co-obligor who had no defence against it but also to transfer to the co-obligor who has paid in full the liability which the party having the defence would have had. It was answered that there was nothing wrong with that : it was inherent in joint and several liability, and similar to the consequences when one of the co-obligors becomes insolvent (see below, art. 1.15). It was suggested to make it clear that the defences at stake are those which already existed at the time joint and several liability arose (SR 2007, par. 111-121).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

The model of the proposed provision is the OHADA draft (art. 10/11, 4°), itself inspired by the Quebec Code (art. 1539). The corresponding provision in PECL allows the contributing obligor to assert only personal defences (art. 10:111, 2°). Subject to further research, other codifications seem to be silent on the matter. This provision has been retained since the issue is quite important between co-obligors. The solutions are coherent with those provided by article 1.4 (defences asserted against the obligee). Defences that may arise between obligors are another matter, which this provision does not cover.

As suggested at Rome 2007 (SR par. 121), the Comments will give examples of the different kinds of defences (coordinated with the Comments to article 1.4).

**Article 1.15** (*Insolvency of a co-obligor*)

**If a joint and several obligor who has performed more than that obligor's share is unable, despite all reasonable efforts, to recover contribution from another joint and several obligor, the share of the others, including the one who has performed, is increased proportionally.**

**Earlier discussions :**

Two possible models were discussed in Rome on the issue of insolvency of one of the co-obligors (PECL, art. 10:106, 3°) and the OHADA draft (art. 10/11, 5°). Preference was expressed for the PECL model, with its requirement that the obligor exercising the recourse must first exert reasonable efforts to recover the insolvent co-obligor's share before all other shares are increased proportionally (SR 2007, par. 122-125).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

Proportional allocation between the other co-obligors of the loss resulting from insolvency of one of the co-obligor is the general solution in codifications that have a provision on the issue : French and Belgian Civil code, art. 1214 ; German BGB, § 426 ; Swiss Code of obligations, art. 148, 3°; Italian Civil code, art. 1299 ; Dutch NBW, Book 6, art. 13 ; Quebec Civil code, art. 1538 ; Russian Civil code, art. 325, 2°. As suggested at Rome 2007, PECL art. 10:106, 3°, with its reference to reasonable efforts, has served as a model to the proposed provision.



## Section 2 : Plurality of obligees

Plurality of obligees is traditionally treated as the “mirror image” of the chapter on plurality of obligors (which does not mean that all the rules are perfectly symmetrical). However, at Rome 2006, one member pointed out that recent research work tended to demonstrate that the two situations were actually very different and should be approached separately. It was also said that this other approach had been taken by the new Dutch code, but that it did not prove to be very successful (SR 2006, par. 155, 186-189).

Between the two sessions, the Rapporteur engaged into a discussion by correspondence with the collaborator of the Max-Planck Institute who had especially studied the alternative approach<sup>1</sup>. The Rapporteur was not totally convinced of the merits of this alternative approach, if only because practitioners could be disoriented by such departure from a well-know traditional approach<sup>2</sup>. At Rome 2007, the difficulties the new approach had created in Dutch law were explained. It was finally decided that the Rapporteur should follow the traditional approach (SR 2007, par. 134-137). This is done in the following draft provisions.

\* \* \*

### Article 2.1 (*Definitions*)

**When several obligees can claim performance of the same obligation from the same obligor :**

- 1) the claims are separate when each obligee can only claim its share;**
- 2) the claims are joint and several when each obligee can claim the whole performance.**

#### **Earlier discussions :**

Concerning terminology, it was suggested to use the same expressions “separate” and “joint and several” in the context of plurality of obligees as decided before concerning plurality of obligors (see above, under article 1.1) (SR 2007, par. 138).

A default rule on the respective shares when claims are separate was suggested on the model of article 10:202 of PECL (presumption of equal shares), but it was preferred not to include such a rule, in line with what had been decided concerning separate obligations (see above, under article 1.1) (SR 2007, par. 138-139).

A special situation involving syndicated loans and bond issues was mentioned; it was recalled that the Principles do not deal with specific contracts, but that the Comments could make reference to such special arrangements (SR 2007, par. 140-142).

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<sup>1</sup> According to this alternative approach, plural claims could be perceived as assets belonging to several persons. Consequently there could be as many claims as obligees, each obligee “owning” its “own” claim, or there could be co-ownership of the whole claim. In the latter case, the mechanisms of agency and authority (possibly also assignment) could determine who can do what concerning the claim(s), e.g. whether a single obligee can exercise the rights of all vis-à-vis the obligor, grant a discharge or assign the whole claim to a third party. Cf. Posit. paper, pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Posit. paper, pp. 18-19.

**Commentary on the proposal :**

Though the language is different, the respective definitions of separate and joint and several claims can be compared to PECL, art. 10:201, 1° and 2°. There is no definition corresponding that of PECL, art. 10:201, 3°, since the notion of “communal” claims has not been retained for the Principles; some indications will be given in the Comments.

Similar definitions of joint and several claims appear for instance in the French and Belgian Civil code (art. 1197), the Swiss Code of obligations (art. 150, 1°), the Italian Civil code (art. 1292), the Quebec Civil code (art. 1541) and the Russian Civil code (art. 326, 1°).

**Article 2.2** (*Sources of joint and several claims*)

**[(1) When several obligees can claim performance of the same obligation from the same obligor, they are deemed to be joint and several obligees, unless the circumstances indicate otherwise.**

**[(2) Joint and several claims also arise when the promised performance is indivisible.]**

**Earlier discussions :**

It was initially suggested to state as the default rule that plural claims are deemed to be separate, unless the circumstances indicate otherwise. This is the solution in PECL (art. 10:212) and in the OHADA draft (art. 10/14). The discussions at Rome 2007 lead to the opposite solution, one of the reasons being the advantage of having similar default rules with respect to plurality of obligors (see above, art. 1.2, 1°) and of obligees (SR 2007, par. 143-157).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

1) The opposite default rule (presumption of separate claims) is retained not only by PECL and OHADA, as already indicated, but also by the Swiss Code of obligations (art. 150), the Dutch NBW (Book 6, art. 15, 1°) and the Quebec Civil code (art. 1541). Subject to further research, other codifications contain no default provision on the issue. The proposed solution, adopting the default rule retained at Rome 2007, would probably be original.

The exception is phrased in the same language as the corresponding one in art. 1.2, 1°. The contract between the obligor and the different obligees may for instance provide that the claims will be separate, each obligee for its share.

2) Put between brackets. See the Commentary above, under article 1.2, 3°. The decision taken on indivisible obligations will of course influence the decision to be taken on the proposed art. 2.2, 2°, at least if the default rule remains the same.

**Article 2.3** (*Effects of joint and several claims*)

**(1) Performance of an obligation in favour of one of the joint and several obligees releases the obligor towards the other obligees.**

**(2) The obligor has the option of performing the obligation in favour of any of the joint and several obligees, provided the obligor has not been sued by any of them.**

**Earlier discussions :**

Article 10:201, 1° of PECL and the more explicit article 10/15 of the OHADA draft, inspired by articles 1542 and 1543 of the Quebec Civil code, were submitted as possible models at Rome 2007. One member thought the additional language contained in the OHADA draft was already implied by the concept of joint and several claims. Otherwise there were no further comments on the proposed texts (SR 2007, par. 158-161).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

The proposed provision is inspired by the models already indicated. Similar explicit provisions on the effects of joint and several claims on performance by the obligor appear in several codifications, such as the French and Belgian Civil code (art. 1197 and 1198), the Swiss Code of obligations (art. 150, 2° and 3°), the Italian Civil code (art. 1292) and the Russian Civil code (art. 326, 1° and 3°).

**Article 2.4 (*Defences*)**

**(1) The obligor who is sued by one of the joint and several obligees may assert all the defences that are personal to its relationship to the suing obligee or that it can assert against all the co-obligees, but this joint and several obligor may not assert defences that are personal to its relationship to one or several of the other co-obligees.**

**(2) A release granted to the obligor by one of the joint and several obligees has no effect on the other obligees.**

**(3) The rules of articles 1.5, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9 and 1.10 apply, with appropriate adaptations, to joint and several claims.**

**Earlier discussions :**

The corresponding provision of PECL (art. 10:205) was submitted at Rome 2007, and met with the Group's approval (SR 2007, par. 162-163).

**Commentary on the proposal :**

Even more so than concerning defences in joint and several obligations (see above, art. 1.4 to 1.10), domestic codifications can be far from comprehensive in their treatment of defences in joint and several claims. Sometimes, only some of them are covered (see for instance the French and Belgian civil code, art. 1198 and 1199). The Swiss Code of obligations does not even touch the matter. More general principles appear in other codifications (see for instance the Quebec Civil code, art. 1543 par. 2 and the Russian Civil code, art. 326, 2°). The Italian Civil code is the most extensive on the issue, perhaps due to the fact that joint and several claims and obligations are treated simultaneously (cf. art. 1297-1310). The German BGB deals with the specific defence of

merger of obligation, before ruling by reference to the provisions on defences in joint and several obligations (§ 429, 2° and 3°).

This technique of ruling by reference has been adopted by article 10:205, 2° of PECL, and consequently by the proposed draft provision. Release deserves a special treatment. The general rule was also felt to be sufficiently important to be stated in an explicit form, in the first paragraph.

It is prudent to verify the different situations envisaged, through the following different illustrations submitted to discussion.

In each case, X, Y and Z are joint and several obligees. X claims performance from obligor A.

- General principle (art. 2.4, 1°)

Ill. 1. Obligor A may assert against co-obligee X the illegality of the obligation (a defence which could be asserted against all co-obligees) or the fraud through which X induced A to enter the contract (a defence personal to A's relationship with X), but not a similar fraud committed only by co-obligee Y (a defence personal to A's relationship with another obligee).

- Release (art. 2.4, 2°)

Ill. 2. Co-obligee X grants a release to obligor A. This has no effect on co-obligees Y and Z, who are still entitled to claim full performance from A.

Obviously, other obligees Y and Z may also give their consent to the release.

On the other hand, one could also consider a variant according to which a release granted by one of the joint and several obligees would be effective towards the other obligees for the share of the releasing obligee. This is the solution of the French and Belgian (art. 1198), Italian (art. 1301) and Quebec (art. 1543) Civil codes.

Ill. 3. Co-obligee X grants a release to obligor A. A is released from A's share of 100. Co-obligees Y and Z are still entitled to claim 200 (300 - 100) from A.

This is to be compared to the two Variants proposed for the situation of joint and several obligors (article 1.6), but there is probably no necessity of parallelism.

- Settlement (art. 2.4, 3° referring to art. 1.7)

Ill. 4. Co-obligee X pretends to settle for the whole obligation with obligor A, accepting to reduce the global amount. Co-obligees Y and Z not bound by this settlement, unless they have given their consent (comp. art. 1.7, 1°).

Ill. 5. Co-obligee X settles with obligor A, accepting to reduce the amount of its share. Co-obligees Y and Z's joint and several claim against A is reduced by the full amount of X's share. Settling obligee X has no more recourse under article 2.5 against Y or Z (comp. art. 1.7, 2°).

- Performance, set-off, merger of obligations (art. 2.4, 3° referring to art. 1.5)

Ill. 6. Co-obligee X receives full performance of the obligation from obligor A. This discharges A also against co-obligees Y or Z.

Ill. 7. Obligor A exercises a right of set-off towards co-obligee X. Up to the discharged amount, A is also discharged against co-obligees Y or Z.

Ill. 8. Obligee Firm A merges with co-obligor Firm X. A's obligation towards X is extinguished. A remains subject to co-obligees Y and Z's right of recourse, under article 2.5.

- Waiver of joint and several claims (art. 2.4, 3° referring to art. 1.8)

Ill. 9. Co-obligee X waives its right to exercise a joint and several claim towards obligor A, and announces that it will claim payment of only its share of 100. This will not affect co-obligees Y and Z's right to each claim the full amount.

- Limitation (art. 2.4, 3° referring to art. 1.9)

Ill. 10. Co-obligee X's claim against obligor A is time-barred. This does not affect co-obligees Y and Z's claims against A. If Y or Z receives performance from A, X can claim its share from Y or Z.

- Effect of judgment (art. 2.4, 3° referring to art. 1.10)

Ill. 11. A judgment affects the rights or obligations of co-obligee X towards obligor A. Neither the rights of co-obligees Y or Z against A nor their recourses between themselves under article 2.5 are affected.

## **Article 2.5** (*Allocation between joint and several obligees*)

**(1) Joint and several obligees are entitled to equal shares, unless the circumstances indicate otherwise.**

**(2) An obligee who has received more than its share must transfer the excess to the other obligees to the extent of their respective shares.**

### **Earlier discussions :**

The corresponding, and very similar, provisions of PECL (art. 10:204) and OHADA (art. 10/16) were submitted at Rome 2007, and met with the Group's approval (SR 2007, par. 164).

### **Commentary on the proposal :**

The proposed provision is inspired by the PECL model. The principle of equal shares is also expressed in some other codifications, such as the German BGB (§ 430), the Italian Civil code (art. 1298) and the Russian Civil code, art. 326, 4°. The obligation to transfer performance received in excess of one's share is most often implicit.