

Preface

THE U4 ENVIRONMENTAL LAW NETWORK

The U4 Network is a European University Network of Ghent University (BE), the University of Göttingen (DE), the University of Groningen (NL) and Uppsala University (SE). The partnership firstly aims to provide a supportive platform for joint cooperative initiatives in the field of education, research and institutional management, as well as to offer a solid framework for cooperation as preferential partners in international projects and contexts. The ambition of the U4 Network is to strengthen the international position and visibility of the individual partner institutions through intensive cooperation. The U4 Network aims to broaden the partner universities' educational offerings, facilitate and enhance the U4 students' international experiences, strengthen the research output, and share knowledge and pool resources within the field of university management. It further seeks to provide education based on the overarching European values and principles of human rights, openness, and democracy, actively promoting universities' rights to autonomy, academic freedom, and sustainability, as well as strongly advocating the notion of European citizenship.

In the past, several different forms of cooperation had already been developed between environmental law research units and professors of the four universities. Firstly, faculty members of one university participate in conferences organised by one of the others, for example the bi-annual Sino-European Environmental Law Conference headed by the Centre of Environmental and Energy Law of Ghent University and the Research Institute of Environmental Law of Wuhan University in China; the Conference 'Environmental Law on Three Continents' organised in 2015 by Uppsala University; and the Workshop 'Meeting European Commission and Academia' co-organised in Brussels in 2016 by Groningen University. Furthermore, researchers from the various universities meet regularly within the framework of broader annual meetings and conferences, organised, for example, by the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law, the European Environmental Law Forum or the Avosetta Group of Environmental Lawyers. Other circles in which some of the members meet are the Task Force on Access to Justice of the Aarhus Convention and

the EU Forum of Judges for the Environment. Additionally, joint studies have been undertaken, such as, for example, the study for the European Commission coordinated by Jan Darpö from Uppsala University on the Implementation of Articles 9.3 and 9.4 of the Aarhus Convention in the Member States of the European Union. In 2016, we cooperated also within the context of the Workshop ‘Meeting European Commission and Academia – The preliminary Reference Procedure as a compliance mechanism of EU Environmental Law’.

In 2016, it was decided to further expand on this cooperation by setting up an environmental law cooperation group within the framework of the U4 University Network, specifically in the Social Sciences, Economics and Law part thereof. The U4 Environmental Law Network brings together researchers from the partner universities, as well as from other European or non-European universities, depending on the type of activity taking place (conference or workshop for example) to discuss topics falling within the general concept of ‘Environmental Governance and Law’. Within this general theme, more specific aspects are developed as items for workshops, conferences and joint research projects. Topics may include environmental procedural rights (access to information, public participation and access to justice), the role of environmental rights, IT or science in environmental law, the enforcement of environmental law, in particular biodiversity law etc. Within this network, we explore opportunities to set up joint research projects, with a focus on doctoral theses, and identify available funding opportunities. We are aiming to create a network for high-quality environmental law research with European and comparative dimensions.

The different chapters of this book represent a concrete contribution in this regard.

Further activities will be organised in the future and some of them will result in publications destined for a broader academic audience.

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