Strictness and Subsidiarity: An Institutional Perspective on Affirmative Action at the European Court of Justice

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STRICTNESS AND SUBSIDIARY: AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AT THE EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE

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Abstract: The move to strict review of gender equality cases by the European Court of Justice raises questions regarding the institutional role of the Court. Comparisons between the ECJ's affirmative action case law and US jurisprudence serve to illuminate the very different role played by the ECJ as the central arbiter of a supranational judiciary. In its readiness to decide contextual issues better left to the national courts, the European Court has taken an "American approach" to affirmative action out of keeping with its role. Closer attention to the dynamics of the Court's partnership with national judiciaries would serve as a step toward a functional conception of judicial subsidiarity.

INTRODUCTION

The 1995 judgment of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in the case of Kalanke v. Freie Hansestadt Bremen attracted widespread attention both in the European press and in scholarly commentary.1

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Although it was couched in tentative language, many read the opinion as putting the handwriting on the wall for positive action programs in Europe. The Kalanke judgment was handed down the same year as the U.S. Supreme Court issued its Adarand ruling, which was widely viewed as having an equivalent effect on affirmative action in the United States.

In hindsight, both predictions have proved premature. Although affirmative action programs in the United States remain on the defensive politically, attempts to achieve their total abolition in the courts appear to have stalled. Moreover, in Europe, what began as a vigorous legislative counterattack ultimately assumed constitutional force.


See, e.g., Senden, supra note 2, at 146; Sionaidh Douglas-Scot, Ruling Out Affirmative Action, 21 EUR. L. REV. 1586 (1995). Positive action is the European term for affirmative action; in the European context, such efforts are generally focused on gender rather than race.


Opponents of affirmative action notched recent victories in two voter initiatives, Proposition 209 in California and I-200 in Washington, both of which repealed preference programs statewide. See Affirmative Action Suffers Setback, S.F. CHRON., Nov. 4, 1998, at A2 (discussing both ballot repeals). Yet, abolitionists failed in similar efforts in Houston and in the U.S. Congress. See DeWayne Wickman, Affirmative Action Supporters Must Seize the Initiative, Gannett News Services, Nov. 6, 1997 (describing Houston vote rejecting repeal); House GOP Leaders Pull Support for Bill Ending Affirmative Action, DALLAS MORNING NEWS, July 13, 1996, at 7A.

Although a federal appellate court in the Fifth Circuit issued a broad ruling holding holding preferences in public education unconstitutional, the Supreme Court declined to hear the case, limiting its precedential effects to that circuit. See Hopwood v. Texas, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996), cert. denied, 518 U.S. 1033 (1996). Courts in the Sixth and Ninth Circuits have since reached contrary results, creating a split in circuit law. See Smith v. Univ. of Wash., 233 F.3d 1188, 1200 (9th Cir. 2000); Gratz v. Bollinger, 122 F. Supp. 2d 811 (E.D. Mich. 2000). The Supreme Court itself has always been careful to leave a narrow window open for affirmative action in its previous rulings. Even in Adarand, the Court goes out of its way to "dispel the notion that strict scrutiny is 'strict in theory, but fatal in fact.'" 515 U.S. at 237.

as part of the Amsterdam Treaty. Meanwhile, the ECJ, no doubt sensing the political tide, has shifted course. Its judgment in Marschall v. Land Nordrhein Westfalen effectively reversed the result of Kalanke without overruling it.

Beneath their divergent outcomes, however, Kalanke and Marschall raise deeper questions regarding the role played by the ECJ as it moves to “constitutionalize” gender equality by applying a “strict interpretation” of derogations. Although this jurisprudence has inspired a flood of commentary, the Court’s institutional role in deciding individual rights cases—and in particular its interaction with the national judiciaries and the relevance of the subsidiarity principle in this regard—remain undertheorized.


10 See Gillian More, Case Law: Marschall, 36 Common Mkt. L. Rev. 443, 451 (1999) (noting that “various external pressures had been brought to bear on the Court as a result of the Kalanke judgment” and that “[t]he Court does not operate in a policy vacuum”).


13 See infra notes 112–114 and accompanying text.

The present work locates the values served by subsidiarity in the positive action cases and connects them with the roles played by the ECJ and national judiciaries under the Article 234 (formerly article 177) procedure of preliminary references. Comparisons with American affirmative action jurisprudence help to clarify the meaning of “strict” judicial review and point to the very different institutional role appropriate to the central court of a supranational judiciary. By ruling on affirmative action at the European level, it is argued that the Court of Justice decided a contextually contingent question better left to the national judiciaries.

Part I of this article summarizes the Kalanke and Marschall decisions; part II compares the logic of these decisions with the rationales of American case law; part III investigates the way in which these cases analyze equality as a European right; part IV considers the relevance of the subsidiarity principle to this analysis; and part V situates the positive action cases within ECJ’s fundamental rights jurisprudence.

I. FACTS AND LAW

The ECJ’s rulings in Kalanke and Marschall provide a striking contrast because factually the cases are almost identical. In both cases, a male state employee challenged a promotion decision in favor of a female rival based on a preference for the “under-represented” sex where the candidates’ qualifications were otherwise equal. The only factual distinction that appears relevant was that in Kalanke the rules governing the preference may have been more inflexible than those at play in Marschall.

A. Facts of Kalanke

Eckhard Kalanke and Heike Glissmann were candidates shortlisted for a promotion in the Parks Department of the City of Bremen in 1990. Although Kalanke had received the initial recommendation for the post, resistance from the Personnel Committee led to the referral of the matter to a Conciliation Board. The Board ruled that, as both candidates possessed equivalent qualifications, Glissmann should be given priority as a woman. The board relied on a law then in force in the Land (province) of Bremen requiring that female candidates receive preference, all other criteria being equal, in sectors in which women were under-represented. The law defined under-representation as occurring when women constitute less than half of the employees.
Kalanke challenged this outcome under German law. He was unsuccessful in lower courts and then appealed the case to the Bundesarbeitsgericht (the Supreme Labor Court of Germany). That court again rejected Kalanke's German law arguments. However, faced with Kalanke's further claim that the gender preference mandated by Bremen's statute violated European Community (Community or E.C.) law, the German court requested a preliminary ruling from the ECJ under the Article 234 (formerly article 177) procedure of the E.C. Treaty.

Article 234 provides a mechanism for national courts to refer questions regarding the interpretation of Community law to the ECJ. The judgments which the ECJ issues in response to Article 234 referrals address questions of law in the abstract, leaving it to the referring court to apply the law to the facts of the case.

B. The Advocate General's Opinion in Kalanke

Advocate General Tesauro presented the case to the ECJ in a detailed opinion. The opinion began by reciting Article 2(1) of the Equal Treatment Directive's "peremptory" mandate "that there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex." In the Advo-

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15 Kalanke not only challenged the gender preference in principle, but also claimed that, in any case, he was a more deserving candidate. He justified this latter claim, in part, on "social grounds," arguing that as the sole breadwinner in his family, he deserved preference over Ms. Glissman who had no such responsibilities. See BAG, 2 NZA 77 (1994); Prechal, supra note 2, at 1245-1246.

16 See BAG, 2 NZA 77 (1994); Prechal, supra note 2, at 1245-1246.

17 Article 234 referrals operate in a manner roughly analogous (albeit inversely) to the certification procedures in many U.S. states by which federal courts may seek guidance as to novel questions of state law. Although the judgments that the ECJ issues in response to Article 234 referrals in theory only address questions of law in the abstract, it should be noted that the ECJ receives complete case records from the referring national court. The European Court often shapes its legal opinion in light of the facts before it—at times seeming to encroach on the national court's prerogative to "decide" the final outcome. See Jeffrey Cohen, The European Preliminary Reference and U.S. Supreme Court Review of State Court Judgments: A Study in Comparative Judicial Federalism, 44 AM. J. COM. L. 421, 428-30 (1996); Jens Rinze, The Role of the European Court of Justice as a Federal Constitutional Court, 1993 PUB. L. 426, 440-41.

18 Opinion of Advocate General Tesauro, Case 450/93, Kalanke v. Freie Hansestadt Bremen, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, [1995] 1. C.M.L.R. 175 (1995) . Modeled on the French judicial system, advocate generals (AG) serve a special function within the ECJ judiciary. The AG assembles the relevant legal precedents and provides a comprehensive exploration of the issues raised by the case via a preliminary opinion on which the judges may—or may not—rely in reaching the judgment of the Court.

cate General's mind, the gender-conscious basis on which the Bremen law operated clearly involved sex discrimination. The question the Advocate General posed is whether such a law could fall into the exception provided for by Article 2(4) of the Directive, permitting "measures to promote equal opportunity . . . by removing existing inequalities which affect women's opportunities."21

Kalanke was not the first case in which the ECJ had interpreted Article 2(4). An earlier case, Commission v. France, examined the provision in connection with a panoply of special rights that French labor law accorded women, including shortened work hours, early retire-

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21 Id. at paras. 2, 6-7 (quoting Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive).
The case primarily analyzed the permissibility of these benefits under a different provision of the Directive, Article 2(3). However, when it came to Article 2(4), the Court read that provision as "specifically and exclusively designed to allow measures which, although discriminatory in appearance, actually aim to eliminate or reduce de facto instances of inequality which may exist in actual working life."

Advocate General Tesauro interpreted this formulation from Commission v. France as permitting gender-specific measures that are remedial in that they target the obstacles holding women back. By removing inequalities, he argued, positive action under Article 2(4) helps to ensure equality of opportunity, leveling the playing field for men and women. Therefore, despite a gender specific form, such measures do not represent a "genuine derogation[...]"] from the principle of equal treatment. Indeed, Tesauro commented that "it is only in this way that real and effective substantive equality will be achieved."

In making these arguments, Tesauro implicitly adopted a process view of equality. Throughout his opinion, he emphasized that Article 2(4) of the Directive addressed equality of opportunities, not outcomes. Equality was to be regulated only as to process, not result. This distinction lay at the heart of Tesauro's analysis: the Advocate General rejected the employment preference applied under the Bre-

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23 Article 2(3) permits certain "provisions concerning the protection of women" to be gender-specific in form. Equal Treatment Directive, supra note 17, at art. 2(3).
24 Commission v. France, 1988 E.C.R. 6315, at para. 15. Having laid out this interpretive formula for Article 2(4), the Court then merely noted that "nothing in the papers of this case, however, makes it possible to conclude that a generalized preservation of special rights for women [specified by French law] may correspond to the situation envisaged by that provision." Id.
25 See id. at paras. 16-17.
26 Opinion of Advocate General Tesauro, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 15. By contrast, Tesauro opined that pursuing a policy of formal equality of treatment without regard for unequal opportunities "would ... be the negation of equality." Id. at para. 17.
27 See id at para. 13. Tesauro used slightly different terminology: contrasting "starting points" with "points of arrival." He wrote that "giving equal opportunities can only mean putting people in position to attain equal results and hence restoring conditions of equality as between members of the two sexes as regards starting points." See id.
men statute because he viewed it as aimed at outcomes, not opportunities. 28

Tesauro argued that employment preferences were ill-suited to the task of equalizing opportunities because he saw the main structural obstacles hindering women's advancement as lying outside the workplace. 29 He believed that what women needed foremost in order to compete in the labor force was vocational counseling and training to upgrade their qualifications as well as progressive social policies, such as subsidized child-care, to reduce the burden of home life. 30 By contrast, Tesauro viewed employment preferences as "tak[ing] on a compensatory nature" linked to "historical discrimination." 31 Such 'paybacks,' the Advocate General contended, did nothing to address the obstacles which women face today. Instead of tackling the root causes of gender inequality, preferences merely papered over defects in the process by imposing a predetermined result. As such, they offered only "illusory" progress and were "irrelevant" to the goal of enhancing opportunities in the long-run. 32

Tesauro's opinion was roundly criticized in scholarly commentary for relying on faulty premises. By assuming that preferences serve only to compensate for past discrimination, the Advocate General ignored the very real present obstacles which women face in the workplace today. 33 Tesauro suggested that because the Bremen preference only applied where "two candidates of different sex have equivalent qualification [this] implies by definition that the two candidates have had and continue to have equal opportunities." 34—a conclusion that

28 Tesauro repeated his conviction that the Bremen law is not designed to remove any obstacle to gender equality no less than four times in as many paragraphs. See id. at paras. 21, 22, 24.

29 Tesauro described these as "the general situation of disadvantage caused by past discrimination and the existing difficulties concerned with playing a dual role." Id. at para 18. "Dual role" here referred to the conflicting obligations of working women torn between their family lives and career. As for the nature of "past discrimination," the Advocate General elaborated on this in the following paragraph. Id. at para. 19. He referred to "different (historical) social and cultural conditions (for instance, the disparity in education and vocational training)." Id. at para 19. Senden, among others, argued that Tesauro's views amount to a denial of workplace discrimination. See Senden, supra note 2, at 160.


31 See id. at paras. 9, 19.

32 See id. at paras. 18, 28.

33 Tesauro further confused the normative with the actual when he suggested that public employment represents a "sector in which equal treatment of the two sexes is by definition—or at least, ought to be—effectively guaranteed." Id. at para. 24.

34 Id. at para 13. The Advocate General did acknowledge in a footnote the possibility that "the method employed to assess candidates' merits [might] indirectly discrimina...
assumes selections were made solely based on qualifications. In fact, commentators pointed out that the promotion in the initial round of decision-making had gone in favor of the man, Kalanke, based in part on "social criteria" discriminatory to women.\textsuperscript{35}

Furthermore, Tesauro's assumption that preferences acted only at the level of outcomes, not opportunities, failed to take into account the potential for a preference regime to function dynamically as an instrument of structural change. By breaking through glass ceilings and infiltrating "old boy" networks, an early vanguard of women can enact changes that make it easier for women to compete later on even terms.\textsuperscript{36} Indeed, the German court which referred the Kalanke case to the ECJ described a very similar phenomenon when it explained that Bremen's preference scheme may "help to overcome in the future the disadvantages which women currently face" by acclimating people to seeing women in more senior posts.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} See, e.g., Schiek, \textit{supra} note 2, at 240 (noting Kalanke was given priority because his salary supported a dependent and because he had seniority); Prechal, \textit{supra} note 2, at 1246 (priority given to Kalanke as breadwinner); Senden, \textit{supra} note 2, at 161 (same).

\textsuperscript{36} Sandra Fredman, \textit{Affirmative Action and the European Court of Justice: A Critical Analysis}, in \textit{SOCIAL LAW AND POLICY IN AN EVOLVING EUROPEAN UNION} 171, 189-90 (Jo Shaw ed., 2000); Charpentier, \textit{supra} note 2, at 298-99; Fenwick, \textit{supra} note 2, at 267. Examples of such structural changes could include enactment of more family-friendly policies that allow part-time work, flexible hours, and/or family leave. In addition, merely having women on employment selection committees may help to re-orient hiring practices toward gender-neutral criteria.

\textsuperscript{37} See Kalanke, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 14 (emphasis added). Strangely, although this observation was quoted in the \textit{Kalanke} judgment, it did not appear in Tesauro's opinion.
Finally, Tesauro was too quick to dismiss the linkage of preferences to under-representation as purely a numbers battle.\(^{38}\) The problem with this reading of the statute, as Tesauro himself acknowledged, was that “under-representation of women in a given sector [may] reflect[,] existing inequality.”\(^{39}\) He attempted to deflect such concerns by observing that “under-representation . . . albeit indicative of inequality, is not necessarily attributable to a consummate determination to marginalise women.”\(^{40}\) Intentional discrimination is beside the point.\(^{41}\) Under Community law, gender imbalance constitutes prima facie evidence of indirect discrimination, regardless of intent.\(^{42}\) In any case, the purpose of positive action under Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive is to address proactively the more subtle barriers that hinder women’s advancement, without the need to prove discrimination of any kind.\(^{43}\)

By recognizing that under-representation can be “indicative of inequality,” the Advocate General opened the way to a different reading of the preference.\(^{44}\) Tesauro’s qualifier, “not necessarily,” implicitly acknowledged a crucial ambiguity.\(^{45}\) The fact is that, in some cases, under-representation might indicate gender bias that preferences could therefore serve to counteract. Tesauro dealt with this ambiguity procedurally by invoking the standard of review. He presented Article 2(4) as “a derogation from an individual right [that] must be inter-

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\(^{39}\) Id. at para. 24. The link between gender imbalance and bias has also been identified by many commentators. See, e.g., Charpentier, supra note 2, at 12; Loenen & Veldman, supra note 2, at 48.


\(^{45}\) See id.
interpreted strictly. For Tesauro, this strict interpretation could not be reconciled with the "element of arbitrariness in any preferential treatment which is mechanically confined to the under-represented group and based solely on that ground." In other words, the ambiguity would be construed against the statute, and its arbitrariness seemed to belie a remedial intent.

In reaching this conclusion, Tesauro's assessment of the statute's function flowed directly from its form. Preferences that are "mechanically" tied to numbers, Tesauro suggested, can only serve "to rebalance the numbers of men and women, but will not remove the obstacles that brought about that situation." In the absence of a more finely tuned instrument, the preference scheme must thus be rejected.

C. The Kalanke Judgment

The judgment of the ECJ in Kalanke was short and terse. However, as one commentator has observed, almost everything that the ECJ did say could be traced to Advocate General Tesauro's opinion. Like Tesauro, the ECJ began with the proposition that the Bremen gender preference would violate Article 2(1)'s antidiscrimination precept unless it fell within the exception carved out by Article 2(4). Following Tesauro, the ECJ then characterized Article 2(4) as "a derogation from an individual right laid down in the Directive [which] must be interpreted strictly." The ECJ held that national laws such as Bremen's failed this "strict" standard for two reasons.

46 Id. at para. 23. Taken as a general proposition about derogations, this statement merely followed earlier precedents. What was noteworthy, however, was its implied premise that Article 2(4) was a derogation when in fact Tesauro stated at the outset of his opinion that Article 2(4) was "not [a] genuine derogation[]." Cf. id. at para. 17. Earlier precedents had also supported a more liberal reading of Article 2(4). See infra notes 104-109 and accompanying text.
48 Id. Wearing both belt and suspenders, Tesauro added the additional objection that the Bremen scheme is "disproportionate in relation to the aim pursued." Opinion of Advocate General Tesauro, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 25. However, the ensuing clause of Tesauro's sentence made it clear that his real objection was to the "aim" of the statute. See id.
49 Several commentators have suggested that the judgment's opaque style reflected internal disagreement among the presiding judges. See, e.g., Moore, supra note 2, at 161; Senden, supra note 2, at 151.
50 See Peters, supra note 2, at 191.
52 See Peters, supra note 2, at 191.
First, the ECJ asserted that “[n]ational rules which guarantee women absolute and unconditional priority go beyond promoting equal opportunities and overstep the limits of the exception in Article 2(4).”\textsuperscript{53} Second, the ECJ held that “in so far as it seeks to achieve equal representation of men and women in all grades and levels within a department, such a system substitutes for equality of opportunity as envisaged in Article 2(4) the result which is only to be arrived at by providing such equality of opportunity.”\textsuperscript{54}

Based on these objections, the ECJ declared that gender preferences of the kind used in Bremen contravened the Equal Treatment Directive.\textsuperscript{55} The case then returned to the national (German) judiciary for further proceedings in which the Bundesarbeitsgericht annulled the promotion decision in favor of Ms. Glissmann and ordered that the candidates be judged anew.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{D. Kalanke’s Aftermath and the Run Up to Marschall}

In addition to its controversial result, the paucity of analysis in the Kalanke judgment proved unsatisfying to many of its readers. The judgment appeared to state two distinct reasons for invalidating the preference: objecting to both its “absolute and unconditional” form and the numerical equality which it “seeks to achieve.”\textsuperscript{57} The ECJ did not elaborate further as to the rationale behind either objection, although both appeared traceable to language used in the Advocate General’s opinion.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, one is left guessing as to whether the ECJ’s objections represent separate and independent grounds for the decision, or whether they are somehow interrelated.\textsuperscript{59}

This led to much speculation on the part of commentators as to what sorts of positive action schemes would pass muster in the aftermath of the Kalanke ruling.\textsuperscript{60} The European Commission, in its

\textsuperscript{53} See Kalanke, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 22.
\textsuperscript{54} Id. at para. 23.
\textsuperscript{55} Id. at para. 24.
\textsuperscript{56} See BAG 14 NZA 751 (1996); Prechal, supra note 2, at 1249.
\textsuperscript{57} Kalanke, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at paras. 22, 23.
\textsuperscript{59} Something of the same problem applied to Tesauro’s opinion, which provided many more reasons for rejecting the preference; some of these were clearly interrelated, but Tesauro never identified which were necessary or sufficient.
\textsuperscript{60} See O’Hare, supra note 41 (posing hypothetical preference schemes under various conditions and asking which would pass muster); Brems, supra note 2, at 175–76 (same); Senden, supra note 2, at 152–54 (same).
official pronouncement on the case, chose to emphasize the "absolute and unconditional" language of the judgment. By this reading, the *Kalanke* judgment did not invalidate gender preferences per se. Rather, the ECJ struck down the Bremen preference only because its terms were too extreme. Yet, in what way is the preference "absolute and unconditional?" Far from offering unconditional priority to women, the statute stipulated that both candidates must have equal qualifications, and it only applied to sectors where one sex is under-represented.61

One way to make sense of this somewhat cryptic phrase is to read "absolute and unconditional" to mean "automatic," in so far as the wording of the preference law, on its face, admitted no grounds for deviation once the relevant prerequisites were satisfied. Indeed, when the ECJ summarized its ruling at the end of the judgment, it referred to "rules . . . which automatically give priority to women in sectors where they are under-represented."62 On this view, the judgment echoed Tesauro's rejection of the "arbitrariness" of preferences that are "mechanically" applied in the face of ambiguous evidence.63

The ECJ's second objection, concerning the result which the Bremen statute "seeks to achieve," also raised questions.64 The Court saw the statute as directly imposing a result instead of intervening at the level of opportunity (i.e., process) as Article 2(4) envisages. The

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61 See Moore, supra note 2, at 158 ("there are grounds on which it might be argued that the [Bremen law] is not absolute and unconditional"); Brems, supra note 2, at 175 (same); see also Senden, supra note 2, at 152-53 (speculating as to meaning of "unconditional," and querying whether "unconditional" and "absolute" represent distinct tests that must be either separately or cumulatively satisfied).


63 The German court, in referring the case to the ECJ, made it clear that a degree of inherent flexibility must be read into all such laws by virtue of the German constitution and that, in appropriate cases, exceptions must be made. The ECJ acknowledges this implied flexibility in paragraph nine of its opinion, but it seems to have counted for naught in the final analysis. Upon remand, the German court again called attention to this inherent flexibility, chiding the ECJ for paying insufficient attention to this facet of German law, but ultimately, it concluded that the scope of this leeway might fall short of the flexibility which European law demanded, and thus accepted the ECJ judgment as precluding the operation of the statute on that basis. See BAG 14 NZA 751 (1996); Prechal, supra note 2, at 1256-57; see also Senden, supra note 2, at 153 ("[o]ne cannot conclude whether the Court deemed this facet [flexibility] irrelevant or whether it did not take [implied flexibility] into consideration because it was not explicitly introduced in the preliminary questions").

ECJ did not explain why it read the statute as limited to outcomes. However, the contrast it drew between outcomes and process came unmistakably from Tesauro. As such, it would seem that the second objection flowed from the first. Because the statute operated "automatically" to rebalance numbers, it could not be trusted as a remedial tool. Again, form revealed function.

In any event, European jurists did not have to wait long for further clarification from the ECJ as, two years later, a case with almost identical facts appeared before the Court, again as a preliminary reference under Article 234.65 This case also hailed from Germany, this time from the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia. It, too, dealt with a promotion decision between a male and female candidate with equal qualifications. As in Kalanke, the man, Hellmut Marschall, was protesting a preference granted to his female rival based on a Land law virtually identical to that of Bremen's.66

There was one crucial difference between the two statutes, however. The North Rhine-Westphalian version contained an additional proviso which stated that a preference need not be awarded where "reasons specific to an individual male candidate tilt the balance in his favor."67 In other words, whereas the Bremen law was phrased in absolute terms, the law from North Rhine-Westphalia had a built-in "savings clause" to permit exceptions for hardship cases.

E. The Advocate General Opinion in Marschall

Advocate General Jacobs, in presenting the Marschall case to the ECJ, naturally reviewed the logic and structure of the earlier Kalanke opinions. He was of the opinion that the two cases were indistinguishable. Rejecting the argument that the flexibility provided by the "savings clause" sufficed to circumvent Kalanke's ban on "absolute and unconditional" preferences, Jacobs noted that the Bremen statute itself had a degree of constitutionally-implied flexibility. "Since the Court in Kalanke recognized that the rule in issue in that case was subject to exceptions, the reference to 'automatic' priority should be read in that light."68 Indeed, Jacobs stated flatly that "the national rule at issue in Kalanke was not in fact absolute and unconditional."69

66 See id. at paras. 8-12.
67 Id. at paras. 13, 24.
69 Id.
The Advocate General's reading of Kalanke looked instead to the "seeks to achieve" language as controlling. Jacobs observed that in both cases, preferences were awarded only where two candidates have equal qualifications. Echoing Tesauro, Jacobs therefore concluded that, by definition, the candidates already had equal opportunity, and that any award of preferences must therefore be viewed as aiming at imposing a result, rather than remedying deficiencies in the process. Although the "savings" clause may have still intervened to override the preference, Jacobs pointed out that its application was supposed to be limited to exceptional cases. Therefore, although such added flexibility may have mitigated the statute's flaws, it hardly erased them. The statute remained impermissibly focused on outcomes, instead of opportunities. Accordingly, Advocate General Jacobs recommended ruling against the preference.

F. The Marschall Judgment

The Marschall Court started from the same principles and quoted the same law as the earlier opinions. However, it reached very different conclusions. One obvious change between Kalanke and Marschall is that the Marschall Court openly acknowledged the reality of discrimination in the workplace. It observed that:

[Even where male and female candidates are equally qualified, male candidates tend to be promoted in preference to female candidates particularly because of prejudice and stereotypes concerning the role and capacities of women in working life and the fear, for example, that women will interrupt their careers more frequently, that owing to household and family duties they will be less flexible in their working hours, or that they will be absent from work more frequently because of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.]

For these reasons, the ECJ recognized that "the mere fact that a male candidate and a female candidate are equally qualified does not mean that they have the same chances," thereby rejecting the false equation.

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70 Id. at para. 30.
71 Id. at para. 34.
72 Id. at para. 58.
of equal qualifications with equality of opportunity exhibited in the two Advocate General opinions.\textsuperscript{74}

This belated recognition by the ECJ of the discrimination which female candidates face in the workplace made it possible to view some employment preferences as equalizing opportunities (by remedying an unequal process), instead of merely balancing outcomes. Yet, the question remains: How does one tell the difference? The ECJ was noncommittal. It stated only that preferences to women "may fall within the scope of Article 2(4) if such a rule may counteract [prejudice against] female candidates . . . and thus reduce actual instances of inequality which may exist in the real world."\textsuperscript{75} Under this ambiguous formula, preferences could be viewed as going either to outcome or opportunity.\textsuperscript{76}

To resolve this ambiguity, one might expect that the Marschall Court would have examined more closely the context in which the preference functioned. This would have led the Court to face a further ambiguity which had confronted Tesauro: What is the significance of the mere fact of underrepresentation? Yet, the Marschall judgment did not discuss underrepresentation or any other contextual criteria. Instead, it focused on the savings clause. Somehow, the addition of the savings clause permitted the preference to be deemed a process remedy within the scope of Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive.

The judgment of the Marschall Court did not explore what additional criteria could warrant invoking the savings clause, but noted only that the Land chose "a legally imprecise expression in order to ensure flexibility."\textsuperscript{77} The Court accepted this approach, although it required that "the candidates [be] the subject of an objective assessment [that] take[s] into account all criteria specific to the individual candidates" and also stipulated that "such criteria are not such as to discriminate against female candidates."\textsuperscript{78} The Court failed to explain

\textsuperscript{74} Marschall, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363, at para. 30.
\textsuperscript{75} Id. at para. 31 (emphasis added).
\textsuperscript{76} As one commentator noted, "the acceptance that preferential treatment may legitimately function as a compensatory mechanism to 'counteract' such discrimination is a conspicuous shift away from the Court's formalistic reading of 'promoting equal opportunity' in Kalanke." More, supra note 10, at 450.
\textsuperscript{77} Marschall, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363, at para. 5.
\textsuperscript{78} Id. at para. 35. This last condition presumably responds to the concern raised by the Advocate General that allowing open-ended criteria to be taken into account at this stage could reintroduce the very same discriminatory attitudes that the preference was ostensibly designed to overcome. See Opinion of Advocate General Jacobs, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363, at
how undertaking such an assessment would resolve the ambiguity that it found fatal in *Kalanke*.79 Nothing about "criteria specific to the individual candidates" could be indicative of gender bias, which by its very nature is a group phenomenon.80 Although less "automatic," the preference was no less arbitrary.

Formally, the *Marschall* opinion continued to label Article 2(4) of the Directive as a derogation, which would imply a strict interpretation.81 However, the judgment appeared anything but strict. Instead, the Court used highly hedged language ("may . . . if . . . may") to skirt one ambiguity and entirely ignore another. Moreover, in relying on the savings clause in *Marschall* to distinguish *Kalanke*, the ECJ let the largely symbolic value of individualized review take the place of a more substantive resolution of the underlying issues.

II. RATIONALES FOR PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

Notwithstanding these theoretical deficiencies, the ECJ has adhered to its formula of accepting employment preferences that are based on an "objective assessment" of individual candidates,82 and rejecting those that are "automatic" (i.e., not subject to individualized review)83 in two subsequent cases. In doing so, the ECJ appears to

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79 At best, the savings clause merely introduces additional tie-breaking criteria, the priority accorded female candidates being premised on the candidates being equal in other respects. In any case, the recourse to the savings clause determines whether the preference should be disapplied in exceptional cases, a secondary decision made after one resolves whether it should be imposed in the first instance. See Fredman, *supra* note 36, at 179 (questioning whether the saving clause made any logical difference).

80 Looking at the criteria of individuals to determine if an employment process discriminates against women as a group is just as fallacious as the Advocate General's assumption that equal qualifications implies equality of opportunity. In both cases, the position of individuals is evaluated without its necessary context.


83 Case C-407/98, Abrahamsson v. Fogelqvist, 2000 E.C.R. I-5539, paras. 52-53. Abrahamsson differed from the previous three cases in that the preference applied even though the female candidate had slightly inferior qualifications; this seems to have been an additional factor motivating the judgment. Having rejected the preference under the Equal Treatment Directive, the ECJ then considered whether the provision might be justified under Article 141(4) of the E.C. Treaty, the positive action provision inserted by the Am-
have opted for a solution much like that introduced by Justice Powell of the U.S. Supreme Court in his celebrated *Bakke* opinion.\(^84\) Although rejecting the use of strict racial quotas in admissions to medical school, Justice Powell sanctioned consideration of race as a factor that could be taken into account among other criteria specific to each individual candidate.\(^85\) Although other members of the Supreme Court observed that such a method would in practice yield the same result as a quota,\(^86\) the symbolic appeal of Powell’s individualized approach was undeniable, and Powell’s opinion has remained, in practice, the law of the land ever since.\(^87\)

Justice Powell, however, justified preferences to underrepresented groups based on an underlying theory as to the value of diversity in a university context.\(^88\) Positive Action under Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive, in contrast, is premised on a remedial rationale—promoting equal opportunity by remedying procedural bias in employment decisions—a very different rationale. In this respect, an analogy may be drawn with another line of U.S. affirmative action cases that also considered preferences justified on remedial grounds. In *Croson v. City of Richmond*,\(^89\) the Supreme Court overturned a preference scheme that purported to remedy the effects of discrimination

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\(^85\) Id. at 306–11, 315–19. Powell’s individualized approach was endorsed obliquely in *Johnson v. Santa Clara City Transport. Dep’t*, 480 U.S. 616, 638 (1987), where the Court cited the non-automatic, individualized nature of the Santa Clara preference scheme as a factor justifying its validity under federal employment law. Cf. More, supra note 10, at 450 (portraying savings clause in *Marshall* as vehicle by which “a vision of balancing one individual’s right against another is maintained” as an “acceptable compromise” between treating candidates as individuals and remaining mindful of group needs).


\(^87\) The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit alone has rejected Powell’s *Bakke* opinion as controlling authority in *Hopwood v. Texas*, 78 F.3d 932, 942 (5th Cir. 1996). The Ninth Circuit subsequently reaffirmed the *Bakke* rule, creating a split in the Federal Courts of Appeal. See *Smith v. Univ. of Wash.*, 233 F.3d 1188, 1200 (9th Cir. 2000). A district court of the Sixth Circuit also recently rejected *Hopwood* in *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 122 F. Supp. 2d 811, 820 (E.D. Mich. 2000); that case is currently under appeal.

\(^88\) See *Bakke*, 438 U.S. at 311–15.

against minority-owned companies in bidding for municipal contracts. The Court held that evidence of societal discrimination against such minorities, by itself, would not suffice to justify such preferential treatment. Instead, the Court required that government actors muster “particularized” evidence of discrimination against specific minority groups in the precise context where the preference would apply.90

In making this distinction between societal and particularized discrimination, the Supreme Court, speaking through Justice O’Connor, emphasized that its rejection of the former should not be read to minimize the widespread social injustice that many minority groups had faced. The problem with societal discrimination was that its contours were too “amorphous” to be measured with the precision required for a judicially-determinable remedy.91 Without more particularized evidence, Justice O’Connor worried that courts could not make “[p]roper findings . . . to define both the scope of the injury and the extent of the remedy necessary to cure its effects.”92 Their inability to do so raised the “danger that a racial [preference could be] merely the product of unthinking stereotypes or a form of racial politics.”93 Therefore, while not denying that minorities had been treated unequally, the Supreme Court refused to accept this as a constitutionally cognizable injury because the Court could not be sure enough of the facts to control the remedy.94

Throughout these affirmative action cases, the Supreme Court has underscored the profound distrust with which it views racial classifications of any kind. While defenders of affirmative action on
the Court have argued that a less stringent standard of review is mer­itied where racial classifications are undertaken for "benign" purposes than that applied in earlier racial segregation cases, the majority has rejoined that "strict scrutiny" applies to all uses of race precisely because its benign nature cannot be taken for granted.

It is interesting to note that Advocate General Tesauro made extensive citation to American affirmative action case law in his Kalanke opinion. His doing so was quite unusual for an E.C. opinion. One may speculate that in citing the U.S. cases, Tesauro was gesturing toward the jurisprudence of distrust that this case law embodies. That both his opinion and the judgment of the ECJ apply a "strict" interpretation of Article 2(4) of the Directive as a derogation from equal treatment suggests, at minimum, a discomfort with ascriptive, status-based norms that parallels their U.S. counterparts.

In ruling out societal justifications for affirmative action, however, the Supreme Court acted based on second order criteria, namely its concern over the limitations of judicial review, rather than any real principle of equality. In doing so, the Court makes a powerful statement of centralized authority from its position at the apex of an integrated federal judiciary. I will argue that this model is inappropriate in Europe, where the ECJ engages in a very different relationship with the national judiciaries of the E.C. Member States. In rejecting the Bremen preference, the Kalanke Court assumed the prerogative to pass judgment on a question better left to the national courts.

III. EQUALITY AS A EUROPEAN RIGHT

The controversy that accompanied the ECJ's Kalanke decision has been only partially tempered by its Marschall opinion. Although Mar-

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96 See Adarand, 515 U.S. at 245 (Stevens, J. dissenting) (distinguishing between a "welcome mat" and a "No Trespassing" sign); see also Bakke, 438 U.S. at 358-59 (Brennan, White, Marshall, and Blackmun, JJ., concurring in the judgment in part and dissenting in part) (endorsing lower scrutiny for racial preferences administered through bona fide affirmative action plan).

96 See Adarand, 515 U.S. at 226 ("Absent searching judicial inquiry into the justification for such race-based measures, there is simply no way of determining what classifications are motivated by illegitimate notions of racial inferiority or simple racial politics.").


99 To the extent that Croson, in particular, influenced the Kalanke judgment, the ECJ may also have mistaken the second order rationale of the former for first order reasoning.
“corrected” the result of Kalanke by imputing a different purpose to the preference at issue, it perpetuated the analytic framework and centralized mode of decision-making which Kalanke established. In this respect, despite their superficial difference in outcome, the two opinions have more in common than may be initially apparent.

A. Article 2(4) as a Derogation

As a starting matter, the ECJ’s decision in Kalanke to construe Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive as concerned with opportunities and not outcomes is both reasonable and textually supported. The controversy revolves around how the ECJ distinguishes between them. Amendments to employment criteria to remove or offset gender-specific effects seem clearly permissible as means to equalize opportunities. Likewise, a decision to strike down a fixed 50-50 gender quota solely concerned with outcomes would probably not be questioned. Kalanke and Marschall represent more difficult cases because the preferences were less intrusive instruments that arguably could have served a remedial function.

The key move that the ECJ makes to resolve this ambiguity in Kalanke is the decision to treat Article 2(4) of the Directive as a derogation from the Equal Treatment principle of Article 2(1). This approach allows the ECJ to enforce a “strict interpretation” by which ambiguities are construed against the preference and the statute fails unless shown to be remedial. In imposing this “strict” construction, both Tesauro and the Court cite Johnston v. Constable for authority.

100 The focus of Article 2(4) on opportunities is explicit; the provision refers to “measures to promote equal opportunity for men and women, in particular by removing existing inequalities which affect women’s opportunities.”

101 See Case 237/85 Rummier v. Dato-Druck GmbH, 1986 E.C.R. 2101, [1987] 3 C.M.L.R. 127 (1986), para. 15 (stating that use of employment criteria such as strength should be offset, where possible, by other criteria more favorable to women). In Badeck, the ECJ goes further, approving criteria that it recognized as generally favoring women. Badeck, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at paras. 31-32.

102 But see Peters, supra note 2, at 188-90 (noting some support for equal representation as a legitimate goal of E.C. law).

worker constitutes a determining factor." Such a provision operates in the traditional fashion of a derogation running contrary to the very principle of equal treatment. Therefore, the Court was correct to adopt a restrictive view in that case. To import such logic to Kalanke, however, is arguably to misunderstand the complementary nature of the right that Article 2(4) promotes. Instead of citing Johnston, the Court might have followed the earlier example of Hofman v. Barmer Ersatzkasse, in which Advocate General Darmon pursues this reasoning to its logical conclusion:

The exception set out in Article 2(4) is in a category of its own. . . . It merely appears to make an exception to the principle [of equal treatment]: in aiming to compensate for existing discrimination it seeks to re-establish equality and not to prejudice it. In other words, since it presupposes that there is an inequality which must be removed, the exception must be broadly construed.

In substance, Darmon’s position mirrors that of the U.S. Supreme Court minority that advocated a more lenient standard of re-

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105 The American analogue would be Title VII’s “bona fide occupational qualification” exemption, which U.S. courts have construed very narrowly. See, e.g., Dothard v. Rawlinson, 433 U.S. 321, 334 (1977).


view in the affirmative action cases. By constructing Mr. Kalanke’s right to equal treatment as the fundamental right recognized by the directive and Ms. Glissmann’s claim to positive action as a derogation from that right, the ECJ rejects this more permissive model and elects to strictly construe Article 2(4) in a manner no different than Article 2(2).

A number of commentators have criticized this approach as reflecting a truncated, and overly procedural conception of equality. They see the equality right under European law as encompassing divergent ideals which stand in tension with one another. Scholars argue that, by failing to distinguish between Articles 2(2) and 2(4) in Kalanke, the ECJ “does not do justice to preceding Community law.” By contrast, the Marschall decision is seen as a shift toward a more progressive reading of equality, whereby the Court acknowledges the “lived experience” of women in the workplace.

These analyses overlook the fact that, despite its effective reversal of Kalanke’s outcome, the Marschall Court continues to construe Article 2(4) as a derogation, implying, at least formally, that a “strict interpretation” applies. Cases following Marschall have confirmed that

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108 See Pedro Cabral, A Step Closer to Substantive Equality, 23 EUR. L. REV. 481, 486 (1998); Sophia Koukoulis-Spiliotopoulou, From Formal to Substantive Gender Equality: Are International and Community Law Converging?, 11 REV. EUR. DE DROIT PUBLIC 514 (1999); Marie-Therese Lanquetin, supra note 2, at 98; Peters, supra note 2, at 190; Charpentier, supra note 2, at 4-7; Tiiia Loenen & Albertine Veldman, supra note 2, at 50-52. These critiques reflect the dominant paradigm in European equality law that distinguishes between formal and substantive equality. Formal equality is equated with “procedural” equality (i.e. no distinction between genders), while “substantive equality” is conceived of as a departure from formal equality to take into consideration “the real situation of many women which may place them in a weaker position in the market.” See Helen Fenwick & Tamara Hervey, Sex Equality in the Single Market: New Directions for the European Court of Justice, 32 COMMON MKT. L. REV. 443, 445-46 (1995). Because this terminology tends to become subjective and contextual, this article refers instead to “process versus outcome.”


110 Peters, supra note 2, at 192.

111 Kendall Thomas, The Political Economy of Recognition: Affirmative Action Discourse and Constitutional Equality in German and the U.S.A., 5 COLUM. J. EUR. L. 329, 361 (1999); More, supra note 10, at 450 (ruling in Marschall shows “that the Court has moved towards a substantive meaning for equality”); Catherine Barnard & Bob Hepple, Substantive Equality, 59 CAMBRIDGE L.J. 562, 577 (2000) (“Marschall is the closest the Court has come to recognizing a substantive approach to equality”).

112 Marschall does not actually repeat the language in Kalanke referring to a “strict” interpretation, and, in fact, the rationale it follows seems anything but strict. The same can
derogations from equal treatment require strict review.\textsuperscript{113} Although the degree of rigor clearly varies according to the case at hand, the appearance of strict review in gender equality cases marks a departure from earlier judgments in which the ECJ stressed the "margin of discretion" that Member States enjoy in implementing directives on social policy.\textsuperscript{114} A more nuanced understanding of strictness in the European context holds the key to unraveling the conceptual incoherence of the positive action cases.

B. Strict Review

The usual test applied by the ECJ in reviewing a measure justified under a derogation is that of proportionality, which has three parts: suitability, necessity, and proportionality \textit{strictu sensu}. Suitability asks whether the measure accords with the purpose of the derogation. Necessity investigates whether the chosen means are necessary to pursue this goal. Proportionality \textit{strictu sensu} then balances the goal of the derogation against the burdens that it may engender.\textsuperscript{115}

be said of \textit{Badeck}, which legitimizes quotas for women in vocational training, job interviews, and administrative committees with virtually no judicial review. Yet, as noted, the Court declined Advocate General Saggio's invitation in \textit{Badeck} to reconsider its strict interpretation. Moreover, in \textit{Abrahamsson}, the Court tightened its grip on preference regimes and confirmed that its tolerance for such measures remains limited. See infra note 83 and surrounding text. Although willing to bend the rules, the Court thus appears committed to the formal structure that \textit{Kalanke} established.


\textsuperscript{114} One can see the difference by contrasting the positive action cases with earlier gender decisions. For example, in \textit{Hofmann}, a 1984 case, the ECJ had to decide whether extended maternity benefits (beyond six months) could be justified under Article 2(3) of the Equal Treatment Directive. The Court held that, although such benefits applied only to women and thus discriminated against men, so long as they could be shown to bear an objective relationship to the purpose of Article 2(3)—namely, the protection of women's biological condition—the measures need not pass any test of strict necessity. Hofmann, 1984 E.C.R. 3047, at paras. 26–27. Rather, the Court held that "the Member States enjoy a reasonable margin of discretion regarding both the nature of the protective measures and the detailed arrangements for their implementation."

Id. at para. 27. In \textit{Habermann}, a case heard only a year before \textit{Kalanke}, the Court repeated similar language about Member State discretion over social policy and cited \textit{Hofmann} for authority. Habermann, 1994 E.C.R. I-1657, at para. 22. By contrast, in \textit{Kalanke}, the Court adopts a "strict" approach, and although the Court relaxes its judicial review after \textit{Kalanke}, its more indulgent approach in \textit{Marschall} and \textit{Badeck} is not premised on Member State discretion. See \textit{Kalanke}, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 21.

Although the ECJ has never spelled out what it means by "strict" review, this seems to describe the intensity with which the proportionality inquiry is conducted, with the Court applying a more exacting standard to one or more prongs of the test. The ECJ most often lays its stress on the second prong, necessity. A strict reading of necessity may require showing that no less intrusive measures were available. Thus, Advocate General Jacobs comments in *Marschall* that "a gender-specific measure will not to my mind be proportionate ... if the same result could be achieved by a gender-neutral provision." The ECJ's insistence on flexibility in the positive action cases, however, most likely stems from its assessment of proportionality *strictu sensu*. In addition to the symbolic value of treating candidates as individuals, flexibility ensures that the preference regime will not penalize "innocent" males unduly.

An unstated aspect of strict review is skepticism. Justifications for derogations may no longer be taken on faith because "what appears to be a [remedial] measure ... may easily turn into a measure which is perpetuating and even legitimizing the traditional division of roles between men and women." Instead, "exceptions ... must be sufficiently transparent so as to permit effective supervision by the Commission [and the courts]." This means that potentially dis-

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116 Id. at 66.
117 Id.
118 Opinion of Advocate General Jacobs, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363 at para. 43; see also Prechal, supra note 2, at 1253 (strict proportionality test means the objective cannot be reached by gender-neutral means).
119 This may be seen more clearly in *Badeck* and *Abrahamsson*, where *Marschall*'s stipulation about taking into account "all criteria specific to the individual candidates" is rephrased as "[i]n account the specific personal situations of the candidates—a formulation more evocative of the individual hardships that this aspect of proportionality is geared towards. See Badeck, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at para. 23; Abrahamsson, 2000 E.C.R. I-5539, at para. 43. *Cf.* Johnson, 480 U.S. at 638 (non-automatic preference minimizes burden on male candidates).
120 Prechal, supra note 2, at 1253.
criminatory measures must be "governed by [] objective criteri[a] defined in a legislative provision." 122

In applying this intense scrutiny of both ends and means, European strict review resembles the "searching judicial inquiry" of American strict scrutiny. 123 In both cases, the proceedings are animated by a distrust of political actors operating in the name of protecting individual rights. 124 A basic difference between American and European methodology, however, concerns the procedure for preliminary references. In exercising this shared jurisdiction, the ECJ often defers to the national courts to apply proportionality; it does so habitually in its indirect discrimination cases. 125 This display of judicial comity comports with Article 234 (formerly article 177), which reserves questions of fact to be determined by the referring court.

The U.S. judicial system, by contrast, permits far greater latitude for centralized adjudication of constitutional rights. The Supreme Court's direct appellate jurisdiction over both state and federal courts gives it unquestioned control over all facets of federal law, including fact finding and remedies. 126 In _Kalanke_ and _Marschall_, the ECJ appears to arrogate to itself a similar prerogative to rule on proportionality as a matter of Community law. As will be suggested below, in doing so, the ECJ seems to resemble more an American than European court by acting outside of its role in a supranational regime. The key difference between _Kalanke_ and _Marschall_ concerns their reading of...

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123 _Croson_, 488 U.S. at 493; _see also_ Wittmer v. Peters, 87 F.3d 916, 918 (7th Cir. 1996) (describing the "skeptical, questioning, beady-eyed scrutiny that the law requires when public officials use race to allocate burdens or benefits"). To survive this "intense scrutiny . . . [government actors must] show that they are motivated by a truly powerful and worthy concern and that the racial measure that they have adopted is a plainly apt response to that concern. They must show that they had to do something and had no alternative to what they did. The concern and the response, moreover, must be substantiated and not merely asserted." _Id._

124 _See Croson_, 488 U.S. at 493 ("the purpose of strict scrutiny is to 'smoke out' illegitimate uses of . . . suspect tool[s]"); _Adarand_, 515 U.S. at 233 (describing skepticism as a basic principle of strict scrutiny); _see supra_ notes 122–124 and accompanying text.

125 _See Hervey, supra note 14, at 212–14.

126 _See infra_ note 147 and accompanying text.
purpose: did the preference aim at outcomes or opportunity? Unfortu­
nately, as seen earlier, the ECJ never resolved this fundamental am­
biguity. In Kalanke, Tesauro incorrectly assumed that qualifications are
synonymous with opportunity. In Marschall, the ECJ recognized that
such assumptions could be belied by gender bias, but saw no need to
identify the context in which such bias existed. Moreover, in endors­
ing the deliberately opaque wording of the savings clause, the ECJ vi­
olated its own rule that prima facie discrimination can only be justified
by objective criteria, not generalizations. 127

To some degree, the ECJ appeared to remedy this latter defect in
Abrahamsson, where it “emphasise[d] that the application of [selecti­
on] criteria must be transparent and amenable to review . . . based
on clear and unambiguous criteria.” 128 However, the ECJ seemed no
clearer in its fourth preliminary ruling on the subject of these criteria
than it was in its first. 129

In Badeck, the ECJ more explicitly embraced the opportu­
nity/outcome dichotomy, introduced by Advocate General Tesauro,
to justify strict gender quotas on allocations of employment training
and job interview slots. 130 Yet, it has continued to encounter
difficulties applying this paradigm to preferential selection schemes.
In Abrahamsson, the ECJ was clearly troubled by the fact that, unlike
the prior cases, preferences could be granted even though the
beneficiary had slightly inferior qualifications. The judgment comes
close to suggesting that such preferences must be rejected as solely

127 See Case 171/88, Rinner-Kuhn v. FWW Spezialgebaudereinigung GmbH & Co. KG,
Jacobs seems to have anticipated this danger when he reminded the Court that “the pro­
tection of individuals require[s] . . . that . . . legal rules should be worded unequivocally so
as to give the persons concerned a clear and precise understanding of their rights and
obligations and enable national courts to ensure that those rights and obligations are ob­

128 Abrahamsson, 2000 E.C.R. I-5539, at paras. 49–50; see also id. at para. 53 (criticizing
one such criterion because its “scope and effect . . . cannot be precisely determined”).

129 The Abrahamsson Court cites approvingly selection criteria applied in Badeck de­
signed to emphasize traits that “in general favour women” and thereby “reduc[e] de facto
inequalities [and] compensate for disadvantages in the professional career of [women].”
Id. paras. 47–48. However, the application of such criteria can only be seen as providing an
alternative to preferential selection, not the foundation of it.

130 Badeck, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at paras. 54–55, 60–62. The Court accepted these
measures as designed to put “women . . . on an equal footing with men” without prede­
termining outcomes in terms of employment placement; no proportionality test was re­
quired. Id. at paras. 52, 54.
Yet, the same arguments about bias used in *Marshall* to get around *Kalanke* would seem applicable here: assessment of qualifications can just as easily be infected by bias as the selections based upon them.

It is also telling that the ECJ's reasoning on this point was intertwined with condemnation of the "automatic" operation of the preference and its lack of individualized recourse to objective criteria. As in *Kalanke*, the Court thus continued to look at the form of the statute as indicative of its function. A similar approach was taken by the *Badeck* Court, which endorsed the use of "binding targets" for female advancement and equal representation of men and women on supervisory and administrative bodies. The Court based its decision on the ground that such quotas were flexibly implemented, without bothering to verify that they had a remedial purpose and were necessary in light of that goal.

In structuring the analysis in its positive action rulings around these twin dichotomies—outcome versus opportunity, automatic versus flexible—the ECJ's reasoning has assumed an overly formal character that seems inconsistent with the strict proportionality analysis required for derogations from an individual right. The inability of the ECJ to articulate a more convincing framework to assess the proportionality of positive action arguably stems from its failure to consider the context in which the court applied the preference statutes. Only

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131 The Court notes that "it does not appear ... that [selection] is based on clear and unambiguous criteria such as to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in [women's] professional career[s]." Abrahamsson, 2000 E.C.R. I-5539, at para. 50. Instead, the Court asserts that "selection ... is ultimately based on the mere fact of belonging to the underrepresented sex ... even if the merits of the candidate so selected are inferior to those of a candidate of the opposite sex." Id. at para. 53.

132 Badeck, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at paras. 41-44 and 65-66. In the latter case, the Court went against the recommendation of its Advocate General, see Opinion of Advocate General Saggio, 2000 E.C.R. I-1877, at para. 43. Moreover, the Court’s emphasis on the "non-compulsory" nature of both these quotas seemed to contradict prior case law. Cf. *Case 165/82, Commission v. United Kingdom*, 1983 E.C.R. 9431, [1984] 1 C.M.L.R. 44 (1983), para. 9 (rejecting justification based on the non-binding character of collective agreements containing gender quotas that discriminated against men). In *United Kingdom*, the Court noted that "even if they are not legally binding [such agreements] nevertheless have important de facto consequences for the employment relationships to which they refer, particularly in so far as they determine the rights of the workers [which], in the interests of industrial harmony, undertakings [are obliged] to satisfy," Id. at para. 11. This observation was particularly applicable to the "binding targets" in *Badeck*, as failure to fulfil the targets would have led to more intrusive administrative controls. See *Badeck*, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at para. 9 (in regard to para. 10(4) of the Hesse statute).

133 The Court continued to emphasize both criteria in its most recent positive action ruling. See *Case 476/99 Lommers v. Minister van Landbouw, Natuurbeheer en Visserij*,
by doing so can one speak meaningfully about their purpose and effects.\textsuperscript{134}

C. Context

There are many contextual criteria which the ECJ could have examined. To begin with, built into the statutes was the precondition of gender imbalance that was itself a prima facie indication of bias.\textsuperscript{135} The ECJ seemed to ignore this implication of underrepresentation, dismissing gender balancing in \textit{Kalanke} as purely a matter of outcome, and omitting any discussion of underrepresentation in \textit{Marschall}, where references to gender bias remain tentative and generalized.\textsuperscript{136} Tesauro's was the only opinion to acknowledge, albeit grudgingly, the potential link between gender imbalance and bias.\textsuperscript{137}

Of course, evidence of gender bias need not be confined to a specific workplace. The important factor is the establishment of a context in which proportionality can be assessed on the basis of objective criteria. By ruling against the Bremen preference on principle, \textit{Kalanke} made the question of context irrelevant.\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Marschall} held the opposite, but its ruling was just as peremptory.\textsuperscript{139} It assumed that gender bias is so pervasive as to legitimize preferences Community-wide. In neither case did the Court permit much, if any, leeway upon re-

\textsuperscript{134} For example, a rule giving preference to a certain minority group may be legitimated by a history of discrimination against that group. Without such a history, the rule might itself be deemed discriminatory.

\textsuperscript{135} To be sure, imbalances per se are of limited diagnostic value. A more refined methodology would define underrepresentation by reference to the pool of qualified candidates of each gender. So-called “Croson studies” documenting such disparities constitute the most widely relied on evidence of discrimination in the U.S. to validate affirmative action. Statistically significant “underutilization” may legitimate a narrowly tailored remedial preference. \textit{See} \textit{Croson}, 488 U.S. at 509. In Europe, a similar approach to positive action is applied under Dutch law. \textit{See} \textit{Brems}, supra note 2, at 175 & n.14; Prechal, supra note 2, at 1257 n.26. The preference statute reviewed in \textit{Badeck} also employed this more sophisticated definition of underrepresentation. \textit{See} \textit{Badeck}, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at para. 42.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{See} \textit{Marschall}, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363, at para. 29.

\textsuperscript{137} Opinion of Advocate General Tesauro, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 24 (conceding that underrepresentation of women may be “indicative of inequality,” but “not \textit{necessarily} attributable to a consummate to marginalise women”) (emphasis added).


\textsuperscript{139} \textit{See} \textit{Marschall}, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363, at para. 35.
mand to the national court to judge the preferences within the national context.\footnote{See Kalanke, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 24; Marschall, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363, at para. 34.}

Yet, because Article 2(4) of the Directive grounds positive action in an explicitly remedial rationale, attention to context is critical. It may well be that gender bias is pervasive; however, accepting this notion does not end the proportionality analysis. The problem may vary in kind and degree in different contexts, as may the availability of alternative remedies,\footnote{Cf. Croson, 488 U.S. at 507 (criticizing city officials for failing to consider race-neutral alternatives to preference regime).} making the proportionality of the remedy dependent on the facts of the specific case.\footnote{See Sandra Fredman, After Kalanke and Marschall: Affirming Affirmative Action, 1 CAMBRIDGE Y.B. OF EUR. LEGAL STUD. 199, 212 (1998) ("[I]t is striking that a test of proportionality has been entirely absent from the decision-making of the European Court of Justice on affirmative action.").} The Marschall Court ignored these considerations in favor of a bright-line rule.\footnote{See Marschall, 1997 E.C.R. I-6363, at para. 35. One might say that the Court’s blanket endorsement of flexible preferences is itself in need of a savings clause.}

The later judgments followed roughly the same pattern, but in the reverse. Badeck upheld a raft of supporting measures beyond preferential selection, all as a matter of European law.\footnote{See Badeck, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at para. 38.} At times, the ECJ seemed to gesture toward proportionality assessment,\footnote{Such nods toward proportionality can be discerned at several junctures. The Court noted that the quotas on employment training places only applied to state-run programs and that male candidates had recourse to the private sector. Badeck, 2000 E.C.R. I-1875, at para. 53. It emphasized that other quotas were flexibly implemented, \textit{id.} at paras. 41, 51, 65, or that they were set by reference to the pool of available candidates, \textit{id.} at paras. 42, 57. These observations are relevant to the third prong of proportionality—balancing burdens against benefit—but ignore the issue of whether the measures were necessary to begin with.} but it did not address the issue of necessity, nor did it charge the national court with this task. Abrahamsson rejected the Swedish preference \textit{a priori}, once again with no consideration of context.\footnote{See Abrahamsson, 2000 E.C.R. I-5539, at para. 1. Lommers, the most recent positive action case, to some extent breaks from this mold in that the judgment does refer to specific findings by Dutch government linking the underrepresentation of women in the relevant ministry to a lack of affordable childcare and thus arguably makes its ruling limited to such a context. \textit{See Lommers, supra} note 134, at paras. 36–38.}

In issuing these Community-wide judgments, the ECJ followed the example of the U.S. Supreme Court, whether consciously or not.\footnote{Tesauro’s citation of the U.S. case law shows that the Court was at least aware of this precedent. \textit{See Opinion of Advocate General Tesauro, 1995 E.C.R. I-3051, at para. 9 n.10.}} In doing so, the ECJ broke with earlier cases in which it de-
ferred to the national court on such matters. Even in Johnston, the precedent on which Kalanke relied for its "strict" interpretation of the derogation, the judicial review exercised at the supranational level was minimal. The Johnston Court intoned some warnings about the need for periodic reassessments of "social developments," but left it entirely to the national courts to ensure that the justifications proffered in that case were "well founded." Despite its claim to strictly enforce individual rights, the ECJ thus gave the United Kingdom carte blanche to defend overt discrimination against policewomen in its own home court based on amorphous and unproven assertions of security risks.

IV. Judicial Subsidiarity

There are sound reasons for the ECJ to defer to national courts in assessing the justification for positive action. The European Union (E.U.) may aspire to become "an ever closer union," but the current status of Community law is far from the integrated federal system over which the U.S. Supreme Court presides. A U.S. model of centralized adjudication may be therefore inappropriate for positive action cases in Europe.

The direct appellate jurisdiction exercised by the Supreme Court gives it the last word on questions of federal law, from fact-finding to remedies, even for cases arising in state court. American affirmative

148 See Johnston, 1986 E.C.R. 1651, at para. 39. See Fenwick, supra note 2, at 268 (arguing that Kalanke was inconsistent with Johnston in failing to defer to the national court to assess proportionality).

149 See Johnston, 1986 E.C.R. 1651, at paras. 44-45. Britain claimed that female police officers in Northern Ireland stood in danger of assassination. Yet, the British government offered scant evidence that the situation faced by policewoman differed in any material respects from their male counterparts. The suspicion arises that the only reason for excluding women was that the public would not accept female casualties—a rationale that the Court rejected as impermissible. See id.; Opinion of Advocate General Pergola, Case 273/97, Sirdar v. Army Board, 1999 E.C.R. I-7403, [1999] 3 C.M.L.R. 559 (1999), paras. 34, 43 (criticizing this stance and advocating a more skeptical approach to justifications based on national security).

150 EC Treaty, supra note 9, pmbl.

151 See Fiske v. Kansas, 274 U.S. 380, 385-86 (1927) (Supreme Court has jurisdiction to review state court fact finding on federal questions); Testa v. Katt, 330 U.S. 386, 391 (1947) (same for remedies). The Court does not review questions of state law; state courts remain the ultimate authority on that. See Meredith v. Winter Haven, 320 U.S. 228, 234 (1943). However, the ECJ respects the authority of national judiciaries on domestic law questions to at least the same degree. See, e.g., Case 136/95, Caisse Nationale d'Assurance. Vieillesse des Travailleurs Salaries v. Thibault, 1998 E.C.R. I-2011, [1998] 2 C.M.L.R. 516 (1998),
action cases bear the imprints of this centralized authority. The Supreme Court's decision in *Croson*, which rules out societal discrimination as a justification for preferential treatment based on second-order prudential concerns, provides a strong example of the top-down control that the Supreme Court exercises over constitutional law. 152

In comparison, the ECJ stands in a very different relationship with the national judiciaries. 153 "The constitutional discourse in Europe must be conceived as a conversation of many actors . . . rather than a hierarchical structure with the ECJ at the top." 154 The foundation of this relationship is the Article 234 procedure for preliminary references, which accounts for well over half of the ECJ's caseload, and almost all of its gender equality cases. 155 Under Article 234, the ECJ is restricted to answering questions on E.U. law certified to it by national courts. Jurisdiction to make factual determinations, to apply the law to the facts, and to determine remedies remains with the referring court. 156 These jurisdictional constraints limit the ECJ's ability to impose its fiat unilaterally. Although the ECJ's supremacy on issues of E.U. law is no longer challenged overtly, the ECJ depends on national courts both to refer cases and to implement its rulings afterward, which gives national courts subtle powers of resistance. 157 Lack-
ing appellate enforcement power, the ECJ must therefore engage in a discourse of comity and mutual respect in its rulings, if only to encourage national court compliance.\textsuperscript{158}

At some level, the ECJ must also take account of the subsidiarity principle, the E.U.'s basic principle of federalism. Elevated to the status of a fundamental norm of E.U. law at Maastricht in 1992, the subsidiarity principle requires that the Community act only "in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community."\textsuperscript{159} Viewed primarily as a rule of comparative efficiency, the rule has a normative political element as well. As expressed in the preamble to the Treaty on European Union, it calls for "decisions [to be] taken as closely as possible to the citizen."\textsuperscript{160}

The ramifications of subsidiarity on Community law remain unsettled. Although it has confirmed that the principle is justiciable, the ECJ has yet to imbue subsidiarity with much substantive content.\textsuperscript{161} Most scholarly analysis to date has focused on the way in which subsidiarity might operate as a legislative constraint.\textsuperscript{162} Yet, subsidiarity considerations would also seem applicable to judicial action taken by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} (describing how national courts sometimes make successive references on the same issue to urge the ECJ to reconsider its prior rulings).
\item \textsuperscript{158} See Thomas de la Mare, \textit{Article 177 in Social and Political Context, in The Evolution of EU Law}, supra note 12, at 228. Cynical observers may dismiss this rhetorical gambit as mere window dressing, \textit{see Hjalte Rasmussen, On Law and Policy in The European Court of Justice} 152-53 (1998). Yet, one would hardly expect the strategy to succeed if the rhetoric were not matched by at least some degree of substance.
\item \textsuperscript{159} EC TREATY supra note 9, at art. 3(b); Anderson, supra note 155, at 1-2, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{160} TEU supra note 9, at art. A. The Maastricht Treaty also contains numerous implicit references to subsidiarity principles. Almost every treaty chapter it adds contains language underscoring the intent of the Member States to continue to exercise primary responsibility in the new Community spheres. \textit{See George Berman, Taking Subsidiarity Seriously: Federalism in the European Community and the United States, 94 COLUM. L. REV.} 332, 345-47 (1994) (providing numerous examples).
\item \textsuperscript{162} See Berman, supra note 161, at 400 (generalizing about prior analysis); \textit{see also} A.G. Toth, Is Subsidiarity Justiciable?, 19 EUR. L. REV. 268, 281 (1994); Virginia Harrison, Subsidiarity in Article 3b of the E.C. Treaty—Gobbledegook or Justiciable Principle, 45 INT’L & COMP. L.Q. 431, 435 (1996).
\end{itemize}
the ECJ.\textsuperscript{163} Even if it is not legally bound by subsidiarity, the Court arguably still has to take account of the constitutional values which the principle embodies.\textsuperscript{164} Indeed, the subsidiarity principle was introduced into E.C. law in part as a reaction to activist rulings from Luxembourg.\textsuperscript{165}

The division of judicial roles under Article 234 might be said to embody a kind of judicial subsidiarity, broadly (and anachronistically)\textsuperscript{166} understood, whereby responsibility for decision-making is allocated between national courts and the ECJ according to comparative institutional expertise.\textsuperscript{167} One example of this logic may be the level at which the proportionality test is applied. Commentators suggest that the ECJ is prone to deferring to the national courts to assess proportionality in cases of political sensitivity or highly complex or localized fact-patterns.\textsuperscript{168} Such delegation of decision-making authority to national courts permits decisions to be “taken as closely as possible to the citizen.”\textsuperscript{169}

There are practical reasons for ECJ deference when it comes to positive action. The ambiguous nature of preferences, which aim to establish equality through means that on their face violate equal treatment, requires particular attention to context to ensure that they rest on genuine need, not stereotype. Moreover, the proportionality of such remedies hinges upon highly contingent factors: historical patterns of inequality, lingering effects, and availability of alternative forms of relief, among others. National contexts vary,\textsuperscript{170} and indeed,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Daniel Murphy, Subsidiarity and/or Human Rights, 29 U. RICH. L. Rev. 67, 94–97 (1994) (“Clearly, the court as a Community institution is bound to . . . act in accord with the principle”); de Burca, supra note 14, at 229–32 (arguing that policy choices by ECJ constitute a “law-making function [that] play[s] a significant part . . . in developing and shaping substantive law”); Berman, supra note 161, at 400–01 (speculating on the effects of subsidiarity on ECJ’s willingness to assert E.C. jurisdiction).
\item See Theodor Schilling, A New Dimension of Subsidiarity: Subsidiarity as a Rule and a Principle, 14 Y.B. EUR. L. 203, 215–16 (1994) (distinguishing between subsidiarity in the narrow sense of a legal rule and its broader political meaning as a constitutional value).
\item Clearly, the principles underlying this division of roles were developed prior to the adoption of subsidiarity.
\item Cf. Murphy, supra note 164, at 96 & n.112 (analyzing the Art. 234 (formerly Art. 177)) procedure in accordance with subsidiarity principle).
\item See Tridimas, supra note 116, at 78–80; de Burca, supra note 14, at 224.
\item TEU, supra note 9, at art. A.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the relevant context will often be sub-national. National courts are better equipped than the ECJ to perform such fact-intensive evaluations, and under the division of labor established by Article 234, the task should be theirs.

To be sure, the ECJ can always interpret the law in a manner that resolves factual issues implicitly by generalizing, as it did in Marschall. Yet, by their very nature, such omnipurpose rulings rest on unsubstantiated assumptions incompatible with the strict review the ECJ has professed. No one remedy can anticipate every contingency. Stronger measures may be justified in contexts where discrimination remains entrenched, especially when previous remedies have been ineffective. Such was arguably the case in Abrahamsson, where the ECJ rejected a preference scheme that went beyond those of previous cases without considering the contextual justifications offered by the scheme’s defenders. Conversely, preferential treatment may be unwarranted in fields where women have historically predominated, such as nursing.

A different issue is raised by a judgment such as Kalanke, where the ECJ appears to have acted from reasons of principle, irrespective of the factual context. Clearly, the ECJ has the power to exclude certain justifications as a matter of E.U. law. Could the Kalanke opinion have done this regarding societal discrimination, following the example of the U.S. Supreme Court in Croson? An analogy can be made to

171 Note that the preference regimes at issue in Kalanke, Marschall, and Badeck were all instituted by German lande (i.e. at the provincial level).


173 See Abrahamsson, 2000 E.C.R. I-5539, at paras. 50-53. The Swedish government adopted preference law in Abrahamsson only after it determined that progress toward equality of the sexes had been unacceptably slow and required “an extraordinary effort... to ensure, in the short term, a significant increase in the number of female professors.” Id. Cf. United States v. Paradise, 480 U.S. 149, 166–71 (1987) (strict quota upheld where intransigence by police department caused more flexible measures to fail).

174 Cf. Miss. Univ. for Women v. Hogan, 458 U.S. 718, 727 (1982) (holding that nursing school for women could not be justified as compensation for past discrimination). Normally, one might expect women to be over-represented in such “female” professions, making the need for preferences moot. However, that might not be the case if gender balance were assessed at an administrative level that lumped nurses with other medical staff.

the ECJ's indirect discrimination case law, which also deals with structural factors that disadvantage women. Recognizing the heavily factual nature of such investigations, the ECJ has consistently deferred to the national courts in these cases to assess justifications and apply proportionality.\footnote{See Rinner-Kuhn, 1989 E.C.R. 2743, at para. 15; Enderby, 1993 E.C.R. I-5535, at para. 25; Bilka-Kaufhaus, 1986 E.C.R. 1607, at para. 36; Kowalska v. Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, 1990 E.C.R. I-2591, para. 15; Nimz, 1991 E.C.R. I-297, 1992, at para. 14; Hervey, supra note 13, at 212-14.} However, the ECJ \textit{has} ruled out some justifications on principle as non-transparent or overly generalized.\footnote{See Rinner-Kuhn, 1989 E.C.R. 2743, at para. 15 (justification cannot be mere generalization); Enderby, 1993 E.C.R. I-5535, at paras. 22-23; Bilka-Kaufhaus, 1986 E.C.R. 1607, at para. 36 (separate collective bargaining not justification because non-transparent); Case 109/88, Handels-og Kontorfunktionwerners, 1989 E.C.R. 3199, at para. 20 (rejecting "quality of work" as criteria justifying disparate impact); see also Opinion of Advocate General Darmon, 1991 E.C.R. I-297, at para. 11 ("Although it is not for the Court to appraise the facts, it seems to me that there is nothing to prevent the Court from stating, if necessary, that arguments which are too general may not be regarded as objective criteria.").}

Yet, to extrapolate from those rulings a decision as far-reaching as \textit{Croson} would be rash. The ECJ excluded the justifications in those cases because they masked other, more objective criteria that could have been examined instead.\footnote{See Fenwick & Hervey, supra note 108, at 466-67.} The U.S. Supreme Court did not reject societal discrimination in \textit{Croson} because of a lack of objective criteria supporting it. Rather, it worried that an overabundance of evidence would make it impossible to control the objectivity of the lower courts' fact-finding used to justify preferential remedies. Yet, unlike its U.S. counterpart, the ECJ has no general jurisdiction over fact-finding.\footnote{See, e.g., Bilka-Kaufhaus, 1986 E.C.R. 1607, at para. 36 (national court alone is competent to assess facts).} Moreover, such a strongly centralized ruling would violate the institutional norms within which the ECJ operates as the central organ of a supranational judiciary. Both the prudential understandings implicit in Article 234 and judicial subsidiarity principles outlined above weigh heavily against it.

This is not to say that the ECJ should have no role in vetting positive action plans. It may rule some things out of bounds entirely. For example, in rejecting outcome-based justifications for preferences, the ECJ acted within its prerogative to interpret an E.C. directive. Deciding \textit{which} preference regimes operate in the realm of outcomes versus opportunities is a different matter, likely to be settled only through application of the proportionality test. Here, the ECJ should frame the analysis in legal terms and, if possible, identify the factors to
balance. By supplying extremely detailed guidelines, the ECJ can emphasize that strict review is required. The ultimate analysis should rest, however, with the national courts.

Devolving more of such decisions to national courts would help to reconcile the "strict interpretation" demanded by a derogation against an individual right, with the flexibility that Community law has traditionally allowed Member States implementing a directive on social policy. The difference would be that, instead of deferring to the discretion of national governments, the ECJ would defer to national judiciaries.

V. FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS: COOPERATION VS. CONFLICT

Along with Johnston, the positive action cases mark the initial stages of the ECJ's "constitutionalization" of gender equality, extending to gender cases the same "strict interpretation" that the ECJ applies to economic expressions of the equality right. The change can be linked, at least rhetorically, to the ECJ's fundamental rights jurisprudence. The ECJ has made this linkage explicit in its social security cases. In Johnston and Kalanke, the Court merely refers to equality as an individual right contained in a directive, but the fundamental rights dimension emerges in the Advocate Generals' opinions. Advocate General Darmon, writing in Johnston, states flatly that "a derogation from a human right as fundamental as that of equal treatment

\[180\] Cf. Combined Cases 46/93 and 49/93, Brasserie du Pecheur SA v. Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1996 E.C.R. I-1029, [1996] 1 C.M.L.R. 889 (1996), para. 58 (where the ECJ observes that while it "cannot substitute its assessment for that of the national courts, which have sole jurisdiction to find the facts in the main proceedings ... it will be helpful to indicate a number of circumstances which the national courts might take into account.").


\[182\] See supra note 114 and accompanying text. The ECJ continues to respect a broad margin of discretion for Member States over social policy in its indirect discrimination cases. See, e.g., Case167/97, Regina v. Sec'y of State for Employment, ex parte Seymour-Smith, 1999 E.C.R. I-623, para. 74.

\[183\] See, e.g., Case 137/94, Secretary of State for Social Security v. Thomas, 1993 E.C.R. I-1247, [1993] 3 C.M.L.R. 880 (1993), para. 8 ("[I]n view of the fundamental importance of the principle of equal treatment ... the exception to the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex provided for in Article 7(1)(a) of Directive 79/7 must be interpreted strictly").
must be appraised in a restrictive manner."\(^{184}\) Tesauro's opinion in *Kalanke* terms equality "a fundamental right the observance of which [Community law] ensures" and invokes the catch-words of the ECJ's fundamental rights jurisprudence, describing equality as both "a fundamental value of every civil society"\(^{185}\) and "a principle which is safeguarded constitutionally in most of the Member States' legal systems."\(^{186}\) Previously, the ECJ had enforced such strict interpretations only in its free movement cases, where the equal treatment norm was instantiated in the E.C. Treaty.\(^{187}\) By treating the right to gender equality as "fundamental," these opinions thus place it on par with the quasi-constitutional force of the "fundamental liberties" of free movement.

Strict review in gender cases, however, cuts against the margin of discretion traditionally granted to Member States implementing directives on social policy.\(^{188}\) Constitutionalizing gender equality has therefore added to the already swelling controversy that surrounds E.U. fundamental rights. In *Kalanke*, the ECJ construed equal treatment as a Community norm to reverse the outcome reached under an almost identical provision of the German Constitution.\(^{189}\) The provision in question had been amended specifically to permit positive action following a decision by the German Constitutional Court endors-

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\(^{186}\) Id. at para. 9; see also id. at para. 27 (referring to the "fundamental inviolable objective of equality . . . a fundamental principle").


\(^{189}\) Article 3(2) of the *Grundgesetz* states both that "men and women have equal rights," and that "[t]he state fosters the actual achievement of equal entitlement between men and women and strives to eliminate existing disadvantage." 7 CONSTITUTIONS OF THE COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD 106, apps. ix, xiii (Albert Blawstein & Gisbert Flanz eds., 2000). The relationship between these two sentences of Article 3(2) thus resembles that between Articles 2(1) and 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive. The German proceedings in *Kalanke* that preceded the reference to the ECJ upheld the Bremen preference as a legitimate means to promote equal opportunity for women. See BAG 2 NZA 77 (1994); Prechal, *supra* note 2, at 1246.
ing positive measures in pursuit of gender equality.\textsuperscript{190} Inevitably, commentators saw the \textit{Kalanke} decision as "food for a new fundamental rights conflict" between the ECJ and Germany's Constitutional Court.\textsuperscript{191}

Unsurprisingly, the \textit{Kalanke} decision prompted muttering in German accents about the need to construe fundamental rights in light of subsidiarity.\textsuperscript{192} In \textit{Marschall}, the ECJ defused these tensions by smuggling in Member State discretion through the back door of the savings clause.\textsuperscript{193} However, the Court's adherence to a formal structure that treats Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive as a derogation requiring strict review promises further conflicts to come. Originally conceived as a shield against Community action, E.U. fundamental rights, strictly enforced, will increasingly function as a sword that cuts into the constitutional autonomy of the national judiciaries.\textsuperscript{194}

The inevitable conflicts that will be generated will continue to press the issue of the relevance of subsidiarity in the field of funda-


\textsuperscript{191} Prechal, \textit{supra} note 2, at 1259. Note that the conflict here presents the inverse of the situation in the \textit{Solange} and "Banana" cases in which the ECJ and Bundesverfasungsgericht also clashed. In those cases, the German court sought to ensure that the fundamental rights of their citizenry would be protected against the effects of European law in a manner equivalent to the protection afforded under the German constitution. See Bruno de Witte, \textit{Direct Effect, Supremacy, and the Nature of the Legal Order, in The Evolution of E.U. Law}, \textit{supra} note 12, at 203. Yet, in contrast to this essentially defensive conception of EC fundamental rights, \textit{Kalanke}, and more recently \textit{Abrahamsson}, present cases of a European right intervening where the national equivalent would not intervene, to invalidate a subnational rather than a national norm.

\textsuperscript{192} See, e.g. Senden, \textit{supra} note 2, at 162 (noting that the German government questioned the ECJ's jurisdiction over positive action cases in light of subsidiarity principles); Schiek, \textit{supra} note 2, at 43 (ECJ ignored subsidiarity issue).

\textsuperscript{193} See Charpentier, \textit{supra} note 86, at 193 (arguing that savings clause in \textit{Marschall} returns margin of discretion to Member States \textit{sub rosa}).

\textsuperscript{194} The ECJ embarked on its fundamental rights jurisprudence largely as a defensive reaction to the threat that national judiciaries would apply their own constitutional review of Community law, undermining the supremacy of the latter. See Davies, \textit{supra} note 158, at 133; de Witte, \textit{supra} note 192, at 205-03. Yet, by extending such fundamental rights review to national legislation that implements a European directive, as in the positive action cases, the Court has gained a powerful tool to extend its reach into domestic law—raising the spectre of new fundamental rights conflicts. See Joseph Weiler, \textit{Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Boundaries, in The European Union and Human Rights} 67 (N.A. Neuwahl & A. Rosas eds., 1995) (describing the added tension engendered by these "more direct" assaults on the constitutional autonomy of Member States).
mental rights. Some commentators have proposed borrowing a "margin of appreciation" approach from the European Court of Human Rights to accommodate differing conceptions of equality among the Member States. This article has suggested, however, that at least in the case of positive action and other contextually contingent questions, a potential for diversity already exists within the present structure of Community law. The distinctive roles which the two levels of E.U. judiciaries play under the Article 234 procedure lend themselves naturally to the application of subsidiarity principles. In contrast to the usual portrayal of fundamental rights as an arena in which the ECJ and national courts compete in a zero-sum game, this provides a model of judicial subsidiarity in which the two levels can be viewed as allies, not antagonists, in their common role as protectors of individual rights.

CONCLUSION

This article has revealed the shortcomings of the European Court of Justice's positive action jurisprudence. In relying on "flexibility" as its guiding principle to reconcile individual rights with the competing equality claim of working women, the ECJ has substituted a facile formula in place of the substantive analysis that its putative strict review would imply. Moreover, in ruling on these issues at the Community level, the ECJ has precluded the sensitivity to context that would have been possible had it left the assessment of proportionality to the national courts. These defects stem, in part, from a failure of the ECJ


196 See Eva Brems, supra note 2, at 79; Weiler, supra note 195, at 73.
197 See Besselink, supra note 196, at 665-78 (discussing various models designed to mediate conflicts between divergent levels of rights protection).
to give adequate consideration to its institutional role in interpreting a Community right through its Article 234 interlocution with national courts.

In the years since Kalanke and Marschall, several amendments to the E.C. Treaty have altered the landscape of gender equality law. The Amsterdam Treaty included a specific provision, Article 141(4), designed to reverse the result of Kalanke through a somewhat incongruous appendage to what started as the Equal Pay Article of the E.C. Treaty.\(^{199}\) After the volle face executed by the ECJ in Marschall, this provision has seemed perhaps superfluous.\(^{200}\) In Abrahamsson, the Court declined to give Article 141(4) any independent substantive meaning, although it remains open for it do so in the future.\(^{201}\)

The Amsterdam Treaty has also led to greater Community involvement with social equality. Article 13 of the Treaty provides the E.C. with broad enabling powers to enact anti-discrimination measures protecting specified status groups.\(^{202}\) A pair of new directives passed under this Article have added race, ethnicity, religion, belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation to the list of categories protected from discrimination by E.C. employment law.\(^{203}\) The E.U.'s new Charter of Fundamental Rights contains its own expansive non-discrimination and positive action clauses.\(^{204}\)

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\(^{199}\) See Treaty of Amsterdam, infra note 9, at art. 141(4) (formerly article 119(4)). The full text of Article 141(4) reads:

"With a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life, the principle of equal treatment shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or adopting measures providing for specific advantages in order to make it easier for the under-represented sex to pursue a vocational activity or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers."

See id.

\(^{200}\) Article 141(4) first appeared in draft form prior to the Marschall judgment, when the impact of Kalanke appeared to leave positive action in doubt.

\(^{201}\) See Abrahamsson, 2000 E.C.R. I-5539, at para. 55 (holding in conclusory fashion that Sweden's preference was disproportionate under Article 141(4)—a conclusion it had already reached under Article 2(4)).

\(^{202}\) See Treaty of Amsterdam, infra note 9, at art. 2(7).


\(^{204}\) See Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 43 O.J. (C 364) 13, arts. 20, 23. The Charter was "solemnly proclaimed" by the European Council, Commission,
This continued "constitutionalizing" of equality in Community law will put added pressure on the ECJ to balance the vigilant scrutiny needed to protect fundamental rights against a respect for Member State sovereignty in social policy. The recently enacted Race Directive, in particular, will require even greater attentiveness to context than is the case with gender because race as a construct is much more contextually contingent. To perform this juggling act, the ECJ will need to pay closer attention to managing its cooperative partnership with the national judiciaries. As the ECJ continues to articulate the institutional logic underpinning this shared jurisdiction, it may be possible to develop a viable conception of judicial subsidiarity.

and Parliament, but has not yet been made justiciable; its status is to be reconsidered in 2003.


The beginning of such an effort was made by Advocate General Jacobs in Case 457/93, Kuratorium fur Dialyse und Nierentransplantation v. Lewark, 1996 E.C.R. I-243, 256, where he contrasted economic and social policy justifications offered in indirect discrimination cases, arguing that the ECJ can generalize more regarding the latter. Relevant points of comparison may be drawn from the example of U.S. judicial federalism—e.g. the prudential considerations embodied in the federal abstention and adequate state grounds doctrines. Such comparative analysis will have to await future study.