No Sirve: The Invalidity of Service of Process Abroad by Mail or Private Process Server on Parties in Mexico Under the Hague Service Convention

Charles B. Campbell

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/mjil

Part of the Law Commons

Recommended Citation
Article

No Sirve: The Invalidity of Service of Process Abroad by Mail or Private Process Server on Parties in Mexico Under the Hague Service Convention*

Charles B. Campbell*

Service of process abroad by mail or private process server on parties in Mexico is invalid under the Hague Service Convention. The other alternative methods of service abroad listed in Article 10 of the Convention are invalid, as well. As one might say in Spanish, such alternative service *no sirve*—i.e., is useless—in Mexico. Accordingly, service of process abroad by United States litigants and courts on parties in Mexico should proceed through Mexico’s Central Authority in accordance with Articles 3 through 7 of the Convention.

* Future updates and author correspondence pertaining to this Article will be available on the Minnesota Journal of International Law’s web site, http://www.minnjil.org.

* Associate Professor of Law, Faulkner University, Jones School of Law. J.D., 1993, University of Virginia; B.S., 1988, Auburn University. My thanks to Professor Donald W. Garner for his encouragement and helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.


As used above and in the title, “private process server” refers to a person (usually an attorney) retained in Mexico “to effect service of judicial documents” on a party under Article 10(b) or (c) of the Convention. I do not mean to suggest that a private process server in the United States is not a proper forwarding authority under Article 3 of the Convention. See infra note 39.

2. In this context, the Spanish *servir* is a false cognate for the English “to serve.” As used above, the Spanish *servir* means “to be useful,” and *no sirve* means “it is useless.” See *The Oxford Spanish Dictionary* 759, 1854 (4th ed. 2008).
INTRODUCTION

Mexico acceded to the Hague Service Convention in 1999, with entry into force in 2000. In its instrument of accession, Mexico designated the Directorate-General of Legal Affairs of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs as its Central Authority to receive and forward requests for service of judicial and extrajudicial documents from other contracting States, and objected to alternative methods of serving documents under Articles 8 and 10 of the Convention. Unfortunately, a mistake occurred in the English courtesy translation of Mexico’s Article 10 declaration, making it appear that Mexico’s opposition applies only to the alternative methods of service of process under Article 10 when attempted “through diplomatic or consular agents.” The original Spanish declaration relating to Article 10 contains no such qualification. It instead expresses across-the-board opposition to all of the alternative methods of service provided in Article 10. When a contracting State objects to all of the alternative

---


4. That is, the Dirección General de Asuntos Jurídicos de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.

5. Accession (with Declarations) of Mexico, supra note 3, at 319, ¶ 1 (Spanish text), 321, ¶ 1 (English trans.).

6. Id. at 319, ¶¶ IV, V (Spanish text), 321, ¶ IV, V (English trans.). In accordance with Article 8(2) of the convention, Mexico did not object to service in Mexico on nationals of the requesting State under Article 8. Id. at 319, ¶ IV (Spanish text), 321, ¶ IV (English trans.).

7. See id. at 321, ¶ V (English trans.).

8. Id. at 319, ¶ V (Spanish text). The declaration does recognize that, after the Mexican Central Authority forwards documents for service to the competent Mexican Judicial Authority, the Judicial Authority may use simplified procedures in ef-
methods of service in Articles 8 and 10 of the Convention, “service through the Central Authority is, in effect, the exclusive means.” Accordingly, United States courts are bound to refrain from alternative methods of service of process on parties in Mexico and must use Mexico’s Central Authority.

The mistake in the English translation of Mexico’s opposition to alternative methods of service under Article 10 has led state and federal courts in the United States to conclude that alternative forms of service are appropriate in Mexico under the Hague Service Convention. Until October 2009, the U.S. Department of State circular on service of process likewise suggested that service of process by international registered mail on parties in Mexico was appropriate, at least if a party did not anticipate enforcing the judgment in Mexico.

This Article briefly describes the options for service on Mexican parties in Part I and the principal methods of service of process pursuant to the Hague Service Convention in Part II. In Part III, this Article points out the error in the English translation of Mexico’s Article 10 declaration. The Article then explains in Part IV how the mistake is misleading courts and other authorities in the United States. Part V concludes that service of process in U.S. litigation on parties in Mexico pursuant to the Hague Service Convention should always proceed through Mexico’s Central Authority in accordance with Articles 3 through 7 of the Convention.

9. RESTATEMENT (THIRD) OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS LAW OF THE UNITED STATES § 471 cmt. e (1987); see also id. reporter’s notes 2, 4.


I. OPTIONS FOR SERVICE OF PROCESS ON MEXICAN PARTIES

At the outset, it bears mention that the Hague Service Convention is not the only option available to United States litigants for service of process on Mexican parties. If a foreign party's address is unknown, the Hague Service Convention does not apply.12 If a party can serve a domestic subsidiary or agent of a foreign entity, resort to the Convention may likewise be unnecessary.13 Similarly, if the defendant travels to the United States, a party may be able to serve the defendant under ordinary, domestic rules of service.14 For litigants in federal court, requesting a foreign defendant to waive service of process is another option that can avoid the substantial time and expense of formal service and translation of legal documents.15

If service abroad on parties in Mexico is required, however, compliance with the Hague Service Convention “is mandatory.”16 Various provisions of the Convention nonetheless permit the use of so-called “derogatory channels” pursuant to other treaties to which contracting States may be parties.17 Thus,

---

12. Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 1(2) (“This Convention shall not apply where the address of the person to be served with the document is not known.”); BP Prods. N. Am. v. Dagra, 236 F.R.D. 270, 271 (E.D. Va. 2006); 1 BRUNO A. RISTAU, INTERNATIONAL JUDICIAL ASSISTANCE: CIVIL AND COMMERCIAL § 4-1-4(5) (2000).


15. See FED. R. CIV. P. 4(d); FED. R. CIV. P. 4 advisory committee’s note to 1993 amend.


17. See Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, arts. 11, 24, 25; PERMANENT BUREAU OF THE HAGUE CONFERENCE ON PRIVATE INT’L LAW, PRACTICAL HANDBOOK
U.S. litigants have an alternative to service pursuant to the Hague Convention when serving process on parties in Mexico—service pursuant to the Inter-American Convention on Letters Rogatory and its Additional Protocol, to which the United States and Mexico are parties.

Ordinarily, service under the Inter-American Convention’s Additional Protocol requires a U.S. party to request the court to transmit documents to the U.S. Central Authority for forwarding to the Mexican Central Authority for service, thus making service under the Additional Protocol more cumbersome than service under the Hague Convention. Moreover, the Inter-American Convention and Additional Protocol do not provide for service of process by mail.
In “border areas,” however, service under the Inter-American Convention may be less cumbersome than under the Hague Convention. Article 7 of the Inter-American Convention provides that “[c]ourts in border areas of the States Parties may directly execute the letters rogatory contemplated in this Convention and such letters shall not require legalization.” Un fortunately, neither the Inter-American Convention nor its Additional Protocol defines the term “border areas,” and there are no published decisions interpreting the term. Nonetheless, the U.S. Department of Justice “advises that border states such as Texas and even Florida have transmitted requests directly to foreign Central Authorities.” Others have even reported using “direct court-to-court transmission of letters rogatory” from U.S. courts to Mexican courts. The propriety of such direct transmission by courts is disputed for states that are parties to the Additional Protocol, however.

With the possible exception of courts in “border areas,” service under the Hague Service Convention is less cumbersome than service under the Inter-American Service Convention and Additional Protocol and ordinarily much faster. Thus, parties in the United States increasingly resort to the Hague Ser-

---

22. Inter-American Convention, supra note 18, art. 7.
23. See Inter-American Convention, supra note 18; Additional Protocol, supra note 18.
24. A search of Westlaw’s All State and Federal Cases Database with the query “border areas” revealed 147 cases total, but none dealing with service abroad. See Westlaw search, Sept. 30, 2009 (records on file with the Minnesota Journal of International Law).
27. See id. at 105–06 & nn.20–21 (citing but disagreeing with DAVID MCCLEAN, INTERNATIONAL JUDICIAL ASSISTANCE 71 (1992)); DAVID MCCLEAN, INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN CIVIL AND CRIMINAL MATTERS 68–69 (2002) (Article 1 of the Additional Protocol “makes mandatory as between parties to the Protocol the use of Central Authorities both for the outward transmission and inward receipt of letters rogatory . . . .”); PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶ 291 (“[A]mong States party to the Protocol, only the use of the Central Authority system now appears to be permitted . . . .”); id. at 103 n.365 (citing MCCLEAN, INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION, supra, at 69). Nonetheless, one practitioner reports having “served process by letters of request addressed by the Superior Court in Arizona directly to the State Courts in [Mexico]. This approach has presented no problems thus far, and the Mexican Courts accept the Letters even though not submitted through the circuitous route of the Central Authority.” Mandig & Epstein, supra note 26, at 106.
28. See supra note 20 and accompanying text.
29. See infra notes 46–50 and accompanying text.
vice Convention when service of process on parties in Mexico is necessary.\textsuperscript{30}

II. SERVICE OF PROCESS UNDER THE HAGUE SERVICE CONVENTION

Signed in 1965, the Hague Service Convention entered into force in 1969 with three contracting States—the United States, the United Kingdom, and Egypt.\textsuperscript{31} Since that time, the number of contracting States has grown to sixty,\textsuperscript{32} making it the fourth most widely ratified of the Hague Conventions.\textsuperscript{33}

Prior to the Hague Service Convention, service of process abroad generally proceeded through diplomatic or consular channels or via various less formal modes, such as by mail or agent, as provided in numerous bilateral agreements.\textsuperscript{34} Major innovations introduced by the Convention included:

(a) the introduction of a new preferred mode, service through a designated Central Authority in each Contracting State, using prescribed forms and procedures;

(b) the giving of some obligatory quality to the new Convention;

(c) the addition of ‘guarantees’ to safeguard the position of defendants who remained in ignorance of the proceedings being taken against them.\textsuperscript{35}

According to one scholar, “[t]here is little doubt that the Convention has not only produced an orderly framework within

\textsuperscript{30} See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mex., Response of Mexico to Questionnaire of July 2008 Relating to the Hague Convention of 15 November 1965 on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters ¶ 9(a) (2008), available at http://hcch.e-vision.nl/upload/wop/2008mexico14.pdf [hereinafter Response of Mexico] (showing steady increase in number of incoming requests for service from 2003 to 2007, with U.S. listed each year as one of the countries from which the most requests were received).

\textsuperscript{31} See Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 27(1); see also id. 20 U.S.T. at 372; 658 U.N.T.S. at 165 n.1.

\textsuperscript{32} See Status Table 14, supra note 3.


\textsuperscript{34} See McCLEAN, INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN CIVIL AND CRIMINAL MATTERS, supra note 27, at 18–22.

\textsuperscript{35} Id. at 24; see also 1 RISTAU, supra note 12, § 4-1-1.
which the various forms of procedure can operate but has also, in the Central Authority system, produced a very successful and increasingly well-used mechanism.”

A. SERVICE THROUGH A CONTRACTING STATE’S “CENTRAL AUTHORITY”

The heart of the Hague Service Convention is its default method or “main channel of transmission” of service requests through a country’s “Central Authority.” The process is conceptually simple. A competent judicial officer or authority (“forwarding authority,” “requesting authority,” or “applicant”) in the “requesting State” forwards a “Request” for service using one of the model forms attached to the Convention to the Central Authority of the “requested State” together with copies of the documents to be served. The requested State’s Central Authority then examines the request and, if in order, serves the documents or arranges to have them served. When service is

---

36. M. CCLEAN, INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN CIVIL AND CRIMINAL MATTERS, supra note 27, at 55.
37. PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶ 81.
38. See id. ¶¶ 82–182 (describing service through the Convention’s “main channel” in detail); see also id. at XXXVII Chart 1; EPSTEIN ET AL., supra note 13, § 4.04[1] & [2]; 1 RISTAU, supra note 12, §§ 4-2-1 to -4-3-4.
39. The Department of State interprets the terms “authority or judicial officer competent under the law of the State in which the documents originate” in Article 3(1) of the Convention to “include any court official, any attorney, or any other person or entity authorized by the rules of the relevant court” in the United States. U.S. Dep’t of State, Response of the United States of America to the Questionnaire of July 2008 Relating to the Hague Convention of 15 November 1965 on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters, ¶ 8, available at http://hcch.e-vision.nl/upload/wop/2008usa14.pdf (last visited Nov. 1, 2009). At least one court has held that a private process server is a competent forwarding authority. Greene v. Le Dorze, No. CA 3-96-CV-590-R, 1998 WL 158632, at *1-2 (N.D. Tex. Mar. 24, 1998); see also PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶¶ 103–04 (noting that most private process servers in the United States feel they are entitled “to act as applicants on request forms of the Convention,” but some “instead have the plaintiff’s attorney execute the [re]quest forms.”).
40. Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 3. Many states require the request and document to be translated into the requested state’s official language. See id. art. 5(3); 1 RISTAU, supra note 12, § 4-2-3(5); Accession (with Declarations) of Mexico, supra note 3, ¶ 2, at 319 (Spanish text), ¶ 2, at 321 (English trans.).
41. Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 5. The Convention does not authorize the requested State’s Central Authority to screen the documents and assess or appraise their content or the merits of the case. The power of the Central Authority is limited to verify (i) that the Request is properly filled in..., (ii) that the matter relates to a ‘civil or commercial matter’ . . . , and (iii) that compliance with the Request will not
complete, the Central Authority fills out a “Certificate,” using another model form attached to the Convention, giving the details of service and returns it to the applicant.42 "The Certificate creates a rebuttable presumption of valid service allowing the proceedings to continue before the [requesting State’s] court."43

Under Article 5, the requested State’s Central Authority may effect service in one of three ways:

(i) a method provided under the law of the requested State (formal service), (ii) a particular method requested by the applicant, unless it is incompatible with the law of the requested State (service by a particular method), or by (iii) delivery to the addressee who accepts the document voluntarily (informal delivery).44

According to the Permanent Bureau, “[i]n general, the Convention has shortened significantly [the] time for execution of requests for service transmitted from abroad . . . .”45 Indeed, the U.S. Department of State advises litigants that service of process by conventional letters rogatory entails “habitual time delays of up to a year or more,”46 that service pursuant to the Inter-American Service Convention “[g]enerally . . . can take 6 months to a year,”47 but that “the Hague Conference on Private

infringe the requested State’s sovereignty or security . . . .

PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶ 124; see also 1 RISTAU, supra note 12, §§ 4-4-1 to -2.

42. Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 6(1); see also 1 RISTAU, supra note 12, § 4-3-4. The Central Authority may also designate another authority, such as the local court that effects service, to complete the certificate. Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 6(1). If the document cannot be served, the Certificate “shall set out the reasons which have prevented service.” Id. art. 6(2).

43. PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶ 170 (emphasis removed).

44. Id. ¶ 127; Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 5(1) & (2); see also 1 RISTAU, supra note 12, § 4-3-1.

45. PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶ 157.

46. U.S. Dep’t of State, Circular: Service of Legal Documents Abroad, http://travel.state.gov/law/info/judicial/judicial_680.html (last visited Nov. 1, 2009) (emphasis removed); U.S. Dep’t of State, Circular: Preparation of Letters Rogatory, http://www.travel.state.gov/law/info/judicial/judicial_683.html (last visited Nov. 1, 2009) (“Execution of letters rogatory may take a year or more worldwide.”) (emphasis removed); see also 7 U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS MANUAL § 931.1(c) (2007), available at http://www.state.gov/m/a/dir/regs/fam (last visited Nov. 1, 2009) (“Letters rogatory typically take from 6 months to a year to execute.”); see also 4 CHARLES ALAN WRIGHT & ARTHUR R. MILLER, FEDERAL PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE § 1134 (3d ed. 2001) (when transmitted through diplomatic channels, letters rogatory “clearly are the most time consuming, cumbersome, and expensive method of service provided for in Rule 4(f)” and “should be used only if the foreign country will not permit any other means of service within its territory or a foreign court’s assistance otherwise is necessary. . . .”).

47. Inter-American Service Convention Circular, supra note 20.
International Law advises that most [Hague Service] Convention central authorities generally accomplish service within two months.48

Recent statistical data support these statements regarding the speed of service of process under the Hague Convention. For its 2009 Special Commission on the Practical Operation of the Hague Apostille, Service, Taking of Evidence and Access to Justice Conventions, the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference reported that “the vast majority of both incoming and outgoing [service of process] requests were processed in four months or less,” and that “66% of incoming requests were issued with a certificate [of service] within two months.”49 The statistics reported by Mexico for the 2009 Special Commission were not quite as good, but still far better than the time frames reported by the Department of State for either conventional letters rogatory or requests for service under the Inter-American Convention on Letters Rogatory. In 2007, Mexico served over half of its incoming requests for service under the Hague Service Convention within four months and over three quarters within six months.50 Thus, the Hague Service Convention has established itself as one of the most expeditious means of service of process abroad, and this no doubt largely explains its increasing use in U.S. litigation for service abroad on parties in Mexico.

B. OPTIONAL, ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF SERVICE

The Convention also permits various “alternative channels of transmission”51 in Articles 8, 9, and 10. These “alternative


50. See Response of Mexico, supra note 30, ¶ 9(b), at 11 (chart showing 4.5% of incoming requests served less than 2 months after receipt, 47.8% served between 2 and 4 months, 23.9% served between 4 and 6 months, and 23.9% served between 6 and 12 months after receipt). It took over a year, however, to complete service of process through Mexico's Central Authority in Griffin v. Mark Travel Corp., 296 Wis. 2d. 642, (Wis. App. 2006).

51. PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶ 81.
channels” include:
consular or diplomatic channels (direct and indirect) (Arts. 8(1) and 9),
postal channels (Art. 10(a)), direct communication between judicial of-
fficers, officials or other competent persons of the State of origin and
the State of destination (Art. 10(b)), and direct communication be-
tween an interested party and judicial officers, officials or other com-
petent persons of the State of destination (Art. 10(c)).52

Article 8 expressly authorizes contracting States to declare
their opposition to service through direct diplomatic or consular
channels.53 Article 10 likewise makes service via postal chan-
nels or direct communication contingent on the State of destina-
tion not objecting.54 Such opposition or objection functions as a

52. Id. ¶ 184 (emphasis removed); see id. ¶¶ 185–235 (describing each of these
“alternative channels” in detail); see id. at XXXVIII Chart 2; see also 1 RISTAU, supra
note 12, § 4-3-5.
53. Article 8 of the Convention provides:
Each contracting State shall be free to effect service of judicial documents
upon persons abroad, without application of any compulsion, directly
through its diplomatic or consular agents.

Any State may declare that it is opposed to such service within its territory,
unless the document is to be served upon a national of the State in which
the documents originate.

Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 8 (emphasis added). For a list of coun-
tries objecting under Article 8(2), see Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference on
Private Int’l Law, Table Reflecting Applicability of Articles 8(2), 10(a)(b) and (c),
15(2) and 16(3) of the Hague Service Convention (Mar. 2008), available at
http://www.hcch.net/upload/applicability14e.pdf [hereinafter Table Reflecting Applic-
ability]. Service through consular or diplomatic officials under Articles 8 and 9 is
generally not an option for litigants in United States litigation due to State Depart-
ment regulations that prohibit officers of the U.S. Foreign Service from serving
process or appointing others to do so unless specifically directed by the State De-
54. Article 10 of the Convention states:
Provided the State of destination does not object, the present Convention
shall not interfere with—
(a) the freedom to send judicial documents, by postal channels, directly
to persons abroad,
(b) the freedom of judicial officers, officials or other competent persons
of the State of origin to effect service of judicial documents directly
through the judicial officers, officials or other competent persons of the
State of destination,
(c) the freedom of any person interested in a judicial proceeding to ef-
fect service of judicial documents directly through the judicial officers,
officials or other competent persons of the State of destination.

Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 10 (emphasis added). For a list of coun-
tries objecting under Article 10, see Table Reflecting Applicability, supra note 53.
reservation against the use of the alternative forms of service that are the subject of the opposition or objection.\textsuperscript{55} As already noted, when a State objects to all of the alternative methods of service in Articles 8 and 10 of the Convention, “service through the Central Authority is in effect the exclusive means.”\textsuperscript{56} Thus, “American courts have consistently held that international mail service of civil summonses is not proper in the case of States party to the Hague Service Convention which have entered an appropriate reservation under Article 10 thereof.”\textsuperscript{57}


\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Restatement (Third) of the Foreign Relations Law of the United States} § 471 cmt. e; see also id. § 471 reporter’s notes 2, 4.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Hague Service Convention Circular}, supra note 48; 1 \textit{Ristau}, supra note 12, § 4-1-6 (collecting cases) (“American courts have uniformly held that service of process in the territory of a Convention state that violates that state’s declarations under the Convention is invalid.”); see, e.g., Brockmeyer v. May, 383 F.3d 798, 803 (9th Cir. 2004) (“We therefore hold that the Convention permits . . . service of process by international mail, so long as the receiving country does not object.”); Research Systems Corp. v. IPSOS Publicite, 276 F.3d 914, 926 (7th Cir. 2002), (certified mail is “permitted by Article 10(a) of the Hague Convention, so long as the foreign country does not object.”); Ackermann v. Levine, 788 F.2d 830, 839 (2d Cir. 1986) (“Since the United States has made no objection to the use of ‘postal channels’ under Article 10(a), service of process by registered mail remains an appropriate method of service [on defendants] in this country under the Convention.”); \textit{In re LDK Solar Sec. Litig.}, No. C 07-05182 WHA, 2008 WL 2415186, at *1 (N.D. Cal. June 12, 2008) (because of China’s Article 10 objection, service “cannot be effected by postal channels’ or through the judicial officers, officials or other individuals of the state of destination.”); Arista Records LLC v. Media Services LLC, No. 06 Civ. 15319(NRB), 2008 WL 563470, at *2 n.5 (S.D.N.Y. 2008) (“The Russian Federation has also formally objected to Article 10 of the Convention, thus precluding reliance on the three alternate service methods . . . .”); Mones v. Commercial Bank of Kuwait, S.A.K., 502 F. Supp. 2d 363, 371 (S.D.N.Y. 2007) (because Kuwait objected to service by mail, petitioner’s service of respondent bank in Kuwait “by mail does not meet the service standards set forth in the Convention, nor of Rule 4(f) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.”); see also Memorandum from Leonidas Ralph Mecham, Director, Admin. Office of the U.S. Courts to All Clerks, U.S. Dist. Courts (Nov. 7, 2000), available at...
Some courts in the United States, most notably the Fifth and Eighth Circuits, have gone further and held that service by mail is never permitted under Article 10(a) of the Hague Service Convention because Article 10(a) uses the term “send” rather than “serve” or “service.” The State Department has disagreed, suggesting that the Eighth Circuit’s decision was “incorrect to the extent that it suggest[ed] that the Hague Convention does not permit as a method of service of process the sending of a copy of a summons and complaint by registered mail to a defendant in a foreign country.”

A 1989 Special Commission on the operation of the Hague Service Convention rejected the Eighth Circuit’s interpretation of Article 10(a) as well. A 2003 Special Commission “reaffirmed its clear understanding that the term ‘send’ in Article 10(a) is to be understood as meaning ‘service’ through postal channels.” The Second and Ninth Circuits have similarly disagreed with the Fifth and Eighth Circuits’ restrictive interpretation of Article 10(a).

According to the Ninth Circuit, interpreting Article 10(a) to permit service by mail is “the essentially unanimous view of other member countries of

http://www.laed.uscourts.gov/process_abroad.pdf ("clerks should refrain from effecting service by mail addressed to those countries who have protested such service or who have entered reservations to mail service under Article 10(a).”).

58. See Nuovo Pignone v. Storman Asia M/V, 310 F.3d 374, 384 (5th Cir. 2002) ("[Article 10(a)] does not permit service by mail" because "we will not presume that the drafters intended to give the same meaning to ‘send’ that they intended to give to ‘serve.’"); Bankston v. Toyota Motor Corp., 889 F.2d 172, 173–74 (8th Cir. 1989) (same). But see Brockmeyer, 383 F.3d at 802 (Article 10(a) allows service of process by mail, provided the receiving State does not object, because ‘the meaning of ‘send’ in Article 10(a) includes ‘serve.’”); Ackermann, 788 F.2d at 839 (same); 1 RISTAU, supra note 12, § 4-3-5(2) ("[T]he draftsmen of the Convention intended the language ‘to send judicial documents, by postal channels’ to include the service of process. The use of different terms in the several paragraphs of Article 10 may well be attributed to careless drafting."). See generally EPSTEIN ET AL., supra note 13, § 4.04[3] (citing divisions in the courts); Beverly L. Jacklin, Annotation, Service of Process by Mail in International Civil Action as Permissible Under Hague Convention, 112 A.L.R. Fed. 241 (1993).


61. 2003 Special Commission Conclusions and Recommendations, supra note 55, at 153; see also PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, supra note 17, ¶¶ 213–25 (discussing United States cases).

62. See Brockmeyer, 383 F.3d at 801–03 (“The purpose and history of the Hague Convention, as well as the position of the U.S. State Department, convince us that ‘send’ in Article 10(a) includes ‘serve.’”); Ackermann, 788 F.2d at 839 ("[T]he word ‘send’ in Article 10(a) was intended to mean ‘service.’").
Regardless of the circuit split on the propriety of service by mail under Article 10(a), however, it is undisputed that service by mail or private process server (or other alternative method under Article 10) is improper when a State party has objected to that method of service under Article 10.64

III. MEXICO’S ACCESSION TO THE HAGUE SERVICE CONVENTION AND THE MISTRANSLATION OF ITS DECLARATION OBJECTING TO ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF SERVICE UNDER ARTICLE 10

Mexico acceded to the Hague Service Convention in 1999, with entry into force in 2000.65 The Mexican Senate approved the Convention with numerous declarations on April 29, 1999, and the Mexican government officially published the decree of approval, along with the declarations, the following month in the Diario Oficial de la Federación (Official Gazette of the Federation).66 The President of Mexico signed the instrument of accession on June 2, 1999, and deposited it with the depositary for the Hague Service Convention, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, in accordance with Article 28 of the Convention on November 2, 1999.67 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands transmitted a depositary notification to the States party to the Convention on November 30, 1999, in accordance with Article 31 of the Convention.68 The depositary noti-
ification included a copy of Mexico’s original Spanish declarations, an English “courtesy translation” of the declarations, and a French traduction (translation) of the declarations.69 After the Convention entered into force for Mexico on June 1, 2000,70 the Dutch Foreign Ministry sent another depositary notification to the States party on June 23, 2000, again accompanied by Mex-

69. The United Nations Treaty Series states that the translations were “supplied by the Government of the Netherlands.” Accession (with Declarations) of Mexico, supra note 3, at 321 n.1, 322 n.1. In response to a request for comment on a prepublication draft of this Article, which had attributed the English courtesy translation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the Dutch Foreign Ministry explained that,

when on 2 November 1999 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received the instrument of accession of Mexico to the Service Convention, including declarations in the Spanish language only, the Embassy of Mexico was requested to provide the declarations in either English or French. As a result, the Mexican embassy provided what was headed a “courtesy translation” of the declarations into English. The translation of the declarations from Spanish into French was made by the translation division of the Ministry. This explains the discrepancy between the English text and the French version.


As this Article went to press, the Foreign Ministry of Mexico had not yet responded to a request for confirmation that the Mexican embassy or the Foreign Ministry of Mexico prepared the English courtesy translation. See Letter from author to Joel Antonio Hernández García, Legal Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mex. (Oct. 13, 2009) (on file with author). Resolution of this issue does not affect this Article’s analysis, however. Regardless of which government prepared the English courtesy translation, the original Spanish text of Mexico’s declarations prevails over the English courtesy translation. See infra notes 80–88 and accompanying text.

70. Accession (with Declarations) of Mexico, supra note 3, at 318; see Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 28(3).

A side-by-side comparison of the original Spanish text and the English and French translations of Mexico’s declarations regarding Articles 8 and 10 reveals the error in the English translation of the declaration with respect to Article 10.

[Remainder of page intentionally left blank]
IV. En relación con el artículo 8, los Estados Parte no podrán realizar notificaciones o traslados de documentos judiciales directamente, por medio de sus agentes diplomáticos o consulares, en territorio mexicano, salvo que el documento en cuestión deba ser notificado o trasladado a un nacional del Estado de origen, siempre que tal procedimiento no sea contrario a normas de orden público o garantías individuales.

V. En relación con el artículo 10, los Estados Unidos Mexicanos no reconocen la facultad de remitir directamente los documentos judiciales a las personas que se encuentren en su territorio conforme a los procedimientos previstos en los incisos a), b) y c); salvo que la Autoridad Judicial conceda, excepcionalmente, la simplificación de formalidades distintas a las nacionales, y que ello no resulte lesivo al orden público o a las garantías individuales. La petición deberá contener la descripción de las formalidades cuya aplicación se solicita para diligenciar la notificación o traslado del documento.76

75. Accession (with Declarations) of Mexico, supra note 3, at 319 (emphasis added).

76. Id. at 321 (emphasis added).

77. Id. at 322 (emphasis added).
The parallel phrases highlighted above in Paragraph IV demonstrate what one would expect to find. The Spanish phrase “por medio de sus agentes diplomáticos o consulares” is translated into English (“through its diplomatic or consular agencies [sic]”)78 and French (“par les soins de leurs agents diplomatiques ou consulaires”), where the translated phrases appear in roughly the same position in Paragraph IV of the translations.

The highlighted portion of Paragraph V above tells a different story, however. In Paragraph V, the only place where the phrase “through diplomatic or consular agents” appears in any language is in the English translation. The bracketed daggers [†] in Paragraph V of the Spanish text and French translation above show where one would expect to find phrases in Spanish (por medio de agentes diplomáticos o consulares) and French (par les soins de agents diplomatiques ou consulaires) corresponding to the English. The corresponding Spanish and French phrases do not appear there, or anywhere in the Spanish text or French translation of Paragraph V. In short, the English translation is the only place where the modifier “through diplomatic or consular agents” appears in Paragraph V of Mexico’s declarations concerning Article 10 of the Hague Service Convention.

The side-by-side presentation of Paragraphs IV and V of the Mexican declarations also suggests how the phrase “through diplomatic or consular agents” may have been inserted in the English translation of Paragraph V. Almost identical language does appear in Paragraph IV, and it seems the eye of the English translator may have mistakenly caught this phrase in Paragraph IV and inserted it again in Paragraph V. Thus, the repetition of “through diplomatic or consular agents” in Paragraph V may be a case of what textual critics might call dittography.79

From a legal perspective, the importance of this translation error is that when a conflict arises between an authentic or offi-

---

78. A better translation for the Spanish agentes would be “agents” rather than “agencies.” See THE OXFORD SPANISH DICTIONARY, supra note 2, at 23, 889.

79. See EMMANUEL TOV, TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE HEBREW BIBLE 240 (2d rev. ed. 2001) (“Dittography, ‘writing twice’ (διττός, ‘twice,’ and γραφή, ‘writing’), is the erroneous doubling of a letter, letters, word, or words.”); LÉON VAGANAY & CHRISTIAN-BERNARD AMPHOUX, AN INTRODUCTION TO NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM 53 (Jenny Heimerdinger trans., 2d ed. 1991) (characterizing dittography as “most common error” in New Testament textual criticism); see also 4 THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 881 (2d ed. 1989) (defining dittography as “Double writing; the unintentional repetition of a letter or word, or series of letters or words, by a copyist.”).
cial text and a non-authentic translation, such as a “courtesy translation” or even an “official translation,” the authentic or official text must prevail. “Whether prepared by the contracting parties themselves, by an international body, or by a single contracting or non-contracting State, [official translations] have in principle no value at the international level and in case of divergence between authentic or official texts and official translations the former must automatically prevail.”80 Thus, “if a treaty provides for two authentic languages, it is not permissible to interpret it in case of dispute by reference to a third, non-authentic text.”81

Article 33 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties reinforces this point.82 That provision, which governs the interpretation and reconciliation of treaties “authenticated in two or more languages,” only applies when both language versions have the status of authentic texts.83 In drafting the Vienna Convention, the International Law Commission (ILC) did not “think that it would be appropriate to formulate any general

81. 1 OFFENHEIM’S INTERNATIONAL LAW § 634, at 1283 n.4 (Robert Jennings & Arthur Watts eds., 9th ed. 1992) (citing X v. Federal Republic of Germany 28 I.L.R. 201, 207 (1959)); see X c/ République Fédérale d’Allemagne, Requête No. 222/56, 1958-1959 Y.B. Eur. Conv. on H.R. 344, 351 (Eur. Comm’n H.R. 1959), translated in 28 I.L.R. 201, 207 (1963) (“As to the applicant’s argument based on the German text of Article 26 of the Convention, it is enough to point out that the only authoritative texts are the English and French texts of the Convention . . . . Consequently, the Commission can only base itself on the English and French texts in interpreting and applying the Convention.”); Flegenheimer Case, 14 R. Int’l Arb. Awards 327, 382 (Ital.-U.S. Conciliation Comm’n 1958) (“It cannot be denied that the interpretation of the text of a treaty can be made only by using the versions that have been declared to be authenticated originals by the Treaty itself.”).
83. See Vienna Convention, supra note 55, art. 33 (“Except where a particular text prevails in accordance with paragraph 1, when a comparison of the authentic texts discloses a difference of meaning which the application of articles 31 and 32 does not remove, the meaning which best reconciles the texts, having regard to the object and purpose of the treaty, shall be adopted.”) (emphasis added).
rule regarding recourse to non-authentic versions, though these are sometimes referred to for such light as they may throw on the matter.”84 The ILC deleted a draft rule “concerning the possible use of non-authentic texts when all other methods of interpretation had failed to yield a meaning . . . on the grounds that it might open the door to too wide a reference to secondary versions of the treaty.”85

This principle of treaty interpretation also applies to reservations.86 Mexico prepared, approved, published, and submitted its declarations in Spanish; the original Spanish version is thus the “authentic text” of those declarations.87 As noted, Mexico’s


86. See Restrictions to the Death Penalty (Arts. 4(2) and 4(4) American Convention on Human Rights), Advisory Opinion 3/83, 1983 Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. A) No. 3, ¶ 62 (Sept. 8, 1983) (“Reservations must of necessity . . . be interpreted by reference to relevant principles of general international law and the special rules set out in the Convention itself.”); 1 OPPENHEIM’S INTERNATIONAL LAW, supra note 81, § 614, at 1242 (“A treaty and any reservations to it have to be interpreted together, and reservations themselves are therefore subject to interpretation in accordance with international law.”).

87. See 1 European Inter-State Co-operation in Criminal Matters XXVI (Ekkehart Müller-Rappard & M. Cherif Bassiouni eds., 2d ed. 1993) (“The only authentic text of declarations and reservations being the text in the language in which they were originally formulated, special mention is made of translations.”).

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, “All incoming instruments, letters and notes concerning these [Hague] Conventions should be in English or French (the authentic languages of the Conventions), or should be accompanied by a translation into English or French.” Letter from Gerard Limburg to author, supra note 69, at 1. The Hague Conference apparently takes this a step further, stating that “the relevant authentic texts of the declarations are those submitted in English or French, not those submitted in the language of the State making the declarations (in this case Spanish).” Letter from Christophe Bernasconi, First Secretary, Hague Conference on Private Int’l Law, to G.H.W.M. [Gerard] Limburg, Hoofd Afdeling Verdragen (DJZ/VE), Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken Dienst Juridische Zaken [Head, Treaties Div., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Legal Affairs Service] (Oct. 30, 2009) (on file with author); see also E-mail from Christophe Bernasconi, First Secretary, Hague Conference on Private Int’l Law, to author (Nov. 2, 2009, 04:55 CST) (on file with author).

For the reasons stated above in text, this Article disagrees that “the relevant authentic texts of the declarations are those submitted in English or French,” rather than the original Spanish. Letter from Christophe Bernasconi to author, supra. Because Mexico prepared and approved its declarations in Spanish, the original Spanish text is the “authentic text” of those declarations, regardless of whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico also prepared the English courtesy translation of
declaration with respect to Article 10 of the Hague Service Convention operates as a reservation against the use of Article 10’s alternative methods of service. Thus, in interpreting Mexico’s declaration, the original Spanish text must prevail over the English translation. The original Spanish declaration with respect to Article 10 does not limit Mexico’s objection to alternative methods of service of process “through diplomatic or consular agents.” Mexico’s objection is instead an across-the-board objection to any use of the Article 10 alternative channels of service. United States courts should read the English translation of Mexico’s declaration with respect to Article 10 of the Hague Service Convention without any reference to diplomatic or consular agents, as follows: “In relation to Article 10, the United Mexican States are opposed to the direct service of documents . . . to persons in Mexican territory according to the procedures described in sub-paragraphs a), b) and c . . . .”

IV. UNITED STATES AUTHORITIES MISINTERPRETING MEXICO’S OBJECTION TO SERVICE OF PROCESS BY MAIL OR PRIVATE PROCESS SERVER

Unfortunately, several United States courts and other authorities have been misled by the error in the English translation of Mexico’s Article 10 declaration. For example, until October 2009, the U.S. Department of State circular on judicial assistance in Mexico stated: “There is no provision in Mexico law specifically prohibiting service by international registered mail, if enforcement of a judgment in Mexico courts is not anticipated.” The circular similarly stated that “[t]here is no provi-
sion in Mexican law specifically prohibiting service by agent, if enforcement of a judgment in Mexico courts is not anticipated." 90 A few years ago, another State Department circular listed Mexico among the countries that objected to service by mail, 91 but the Department removed Mexico from the list in 2007. 92 The State Department’s Foreign Affairs Manual nonetheless listed Mexico as objecting to service by mail. 93 The State Department revised its circular on judicial assistance in Mexico in October 2009 to acknowledge that “Mexico’s accession to the Hague Service Convention indicates that service through the Mexico Central Authority is the exclusive method available.” 94

Courts have shown similar confusion due to the mistranslation of Mexico’s Article 10 declaration. In 2002, a federal district court in Texas upheld substituted service on a Mexican defendant through the Secretary of State of Texas because “the Secretary of State properly forwarded service of process on [the defendant] via registered mail.” 95 The court noted the plaintiff’s contention that “Mexico did not make an outright objection to Article 10(a), which allows service of process by mail.” 96

In 2003, a New York trial court noted that “the declaration by Mexico regarding Article 10 addresses only direct service of documents through diplomatic or consular agents to persons in Mexican territory, and is silent as to any other form of service through the Central Authority.” 97

---

91. See Saysavanh v. Saysavanh, 2006 UT App 385, ¶ 18, 145 P.3d. 1166, 1170 (quoting U.S. Dep’t of State, Circular: Service of Legal Documents Abroad, http://travel.state.gov/law/info/judicial/judicial_680.html (last visited by the court Sept. 18, 2006) as “stating that ‘[s]ervice by registered mail should not be used [in Mexico], which notified the treaty repository that it objected to the method described in Article 10(a) (postal channels)’”) (alteration in original).
93. 7 U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS MANUAL, supra note 46, § 953.5(c).
96. Id. at 662.
under Article 10[b] and [c] of the Hague Convention." The court concluded that because "Mexico did not expressly prohibit the private service of process through a privately-retained agent/attorney in its declaration regarding Article 10 of the Hague Convention, . . . such service was proper under Article 10[b] or [c] of the Hague Convention." A federal court in New York reached the same conclusion in 2008 with respect to service by mail under Article 10(a). A California court of appeals similarly observed that "Mexico apparently does not prohibit service on a person by registered mail." The California court found service ineffective, however, because notice by ordinary mail and telephone were insufficient under both California and Mexican law.

In a 2006 decision, a Northern District of Illinois bankruptcy court noted that "the parties agreed that the Mexican government has never indicated any objection to service on its citizens by mail from a foreign country," so the court held "that service by registered mail is sufficient." The same year, however, the Utah Court of Appeals, citing the conflicting State Department circulars, noted that it was "unclear . . . whether Mexico is categorically opposed to service via postal channels from individuals or entities that are not diplomatic or consular agents."

The 2006 Wisconsin Court of Appeals decision in Griffin v. Mark Travel Corp. is particularly noteworthy because the Mexican defendant in that case noticed the error in the English
courtesy translation and brought it to the Wisconsin court’s attention.105 The defendant submitted a certified English translation taken from the Decreto Promulgatorio published in the Mexican Diario Oficial on February 16, 2001, along with a copy of the Spanish original.106 The plaintiffs, on the other hand, submitted a copy of the consular notification regarding Mexico’s accession that counsel received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, which contained the English courtesy translation, as well as a copy of the same English translation from the web site of the Hague Conference on Private International Law.107 The court of appeals held that there was “no evidence in the Record that the purported convention-objections set out in the February 16, 2001, issue of the Bulletin of the Constitutional Government of the United Mexican States submitted to the trial court by [defendant], were filed with the Netherlands’s ministry.”108 Thus, the court refused to consider the Mexican defendant’s translation argument.

In fact, the Mexican defendant had pointed out in its reply brief that the Decreto Promulgatorio it had submitted to the trial court stated that Mexico’s Spanish declarations had been deposited with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands,109 but this apparently did not move the court. The copy of

---

109. Decreto Promulgatorio, supra note 3, at 8. The English translation submitted in Griffin stated:

The adhesion instrument, signed by the Federal Executive on June 2 of 1999, was deposited before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, on November 2 of the same year, according to the provisions in article 26 [sic] of the Agreement on the Notification or Service Abroad of Judicial or Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters, with the afore indicated Declarations.

Defendant-Appellant’s Appendix, supra note 71, at App. 202 (emphasis added), quoted in Reply Brief of Defendant-Appellant at 9, Griffin v. Mark Travel Corp., 2006 WI App 213, 724 N.W.2d 900 (No. 2005AP2298), available at http://libcd.law.wisc.edu/~wb/will0115/487787a1.pdf. The mistaken reference to Article 26 appears in the original Spanish text, and is accurately translated in English; the reference should be to Article 28 of the Convention. Article 26 addresses the deposit of instruments of ratification, while Article 28 addresses the deposit of instruments of accession. See Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, arts. 26, 28. Mex-
Mexico’s accession document published in the United Nations Treaty Series (U.N.T.S.) confirms that the Spanish text of Mexico’s declarations in the Decreto Promulgatorio is identical to the Spanish text of the declarations received by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and registered with the United Nations, but the U.N.T.S. version escaped notice in Griffin. Unfortunately, Griffin represents a missed opportunity to correct the confusion created by the erroneous English translation of Mexico’s Article 10 declaration.

As this brief survey shows, the mistranslation of Mexico’s Article 10 declaration has led to confusion among litigants, state and federal courts, and even within the U.S. State Department. To prevent further errors, a permanent solution is necessary. Courts in the United States need not wait for a permanent solution, however.

V. PERMANENT AND INTERIM SOLUTIONS

The only satisfactory permanent solution to the mistranslation of Mexico’s Article 10 declaration is a corrected English translation. This might be accomplished simply through a rectification to the contracting States.

The Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands, as depositary for all of the Hague conventions, issues rectifications of errors in depository notifications, including errors in declarations, each

---

110. Compare Accession (with Declarations) of Mexico, supra note 3, at 319–20, with Decreto Promulgatorio, supra note 3, at 7–8.

111. It should be noted that the plaintiffs in Griffin also provided formal service through Mexico’s Central Authority. See Brief of Respondent at 21–22, Griffin v. Mark Travel Corp., 2006 WI App 213, 724 N.W.2d 900 (No. 2005AP2298), available at http://libed.law.wisc.edu/~wb/will0115/4877879f.pdf. Formal service through Mexico’s Central Authority was eventually successful, but the process took over a year. See E-mail from Rick Hamilton, Director of Operations, Process Forwarding International, to author (Feb. 10, 2009, 11:44 CST) (on file with author) (indicating service of process on Mar. 20, 2006); Affidavit of Rick Hamilton, Director of Operations, Process Forwarding International (May 24, 2005), reprinted in Defendant-Appellant’s Appendix, supra note 71, at App. 163–69 (indicating delivery of request for service to Mexican Central Authority in January 2005); see also Dirección General de Asuntos Jurídicos, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México, Exhortos y Cartas Rogatorias Internacionales: Consulta via Internet, https://webapps.sre.gob.mx/rogatorias/ (last visited Nov. 1, 2009) (click “Continuar” button; then enter “David Griffin” in the “Promovente” field and click “Buscar”; then click “mostrar” under “Ver detalle”) (showing details of service returned to U.S. on June 15, 2006).
year. According to the Foreign Ministry, however, it “cannot simply rectify the English text concerned on its own initiative. . . . In this case a request for rectification should come from the Mexican authorities, after which a rectification from the depository will automatically follow.” In response to a request for comment on a prepublication draft of this Article, the Legal Adviser of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico indicated that the Foreign Ministry of Mexico had noted the translation conflict and had “taken the first steps toward its modification. The new text in English of Mexico’s declarations concerning the Convention will be published in the near future.”

A rectification of the English courtesy translation could simply strike the words “through diplomatic or consular agents”


114. Letter from Joel Hernández to author, supra note 69.
from the translation or it could provide a completely new English translation. The latter solution would be preferable. Although the current English translation of Mexico’s declaration with respect to Article 10 conveys the meaning of the Spanish original (after the errant “through diplomatic or consular agents” is removed), a more precise translation is possible.115

In particular, a revised translation should take into account how key terms in the authentic English text are rendered in the Spanish translation of the Hague Service Convention utilized and published by Mexico. For example, in the Spanish translation of the Convention, Article 10’s English term “freedom” is translated facultad and “send” is translated remitir.116 Mexico uses both Spanish terms in its declarations.117 A more precise translation of the first part of Mexico’s declaration with respect to Article 10 might be the following: “In relation to Article 10, the United Mexican States do not recognize the freedom to send judicial documents directly to persons in their territory according to the procedures described in subparagraphs a), b) and c) . . . .”118 Thus, a review of the entire English courtesy transla-

115. Although possible and, I believe, preferable, a completely new English translation is not absolutely essential.

Although all translation is inadequate in the eyes of a linguist, only some of them must be regarded as faulty from the perspective of a lawyer. For lawyers, a faulty translation is an erroneous translation that so deforms the text of origin that it injures those who trust the translation. Mistranslation leads a judge to decide a case differently.

Olivier Cachard, Translating the French Civil Code: Politics, Linguistics and Legislation, 21 CONN. J. INT’L L. 41, 56 (2005). As it now stands, the English courtesy translation qualifies as “faulty from the perspective of a lawyer,” using Dean Cachard’s definition, because “it injures those who trust” it, and it is leading judges to decide cases differently in the United States. Id. Simply striking “through diplomatic or consular agents” from the translation would prevent the translation from “injur[ing] those who trust” it, id., and thus would be a sufficient rectification. Because some rectification is in order, however, I offer the observations above in favor of a fresh English translation.

116. Compare Hague Service Convention, supra note 1, art. 10(a) (“the freedom to send”) with Decreto Promulgatorio, supra note 3, at 9, art. 10(a) (“la facultad de remitir”).

117. See Accession (with Declarations), supra note 3, at 319, ¶ V, reprinted supra in text accompanying note 75.

118. Perhaps the best English translation to date of Mexico’s entire Article 10 declaration appeared in an American Translators Association journal. It reads:

In relation to Article 10, the United Mexican States does not recognize the freedom to directly send judicial documents to persons who are in its territory using the procedures indicated in Subdivisions a), b), and c); unless the Judicial Authority, as an exception, grants a simplification of formalities, different from those of Mexico, and provided that it is not harmful to
tion is in order.

In fact, according to the First Secretary of the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, such a review has been underway for some time. The Hague Conference has been working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico on the issue, and in 2009 the Ministry “revised the Mexican declarations in both English and Spanish, on the basis of detailed suggestions from the Permanent Bureau.” Among the most important changes, “Declaration V has been re-formulated so as to clearly express the plain fact that Mexico opposes the alternative channels of Article 10(a), (b) and (c); the previous text referring to ‘diplomatic or consular agents’ and judicial authorities exceptionally granting a simplification has simply been deleted.” Unfortunately, however, “the revised declarations cannot be filed immediately: Due to recent changes to the Mexican Constitution, the revised declarations will need to be approved by the Mexican Senate before they are filed with the Depositary. This process is likely to take several months.”

In the meantime, United States courts should not wait for a corrected English translation or revised declarations to be published; the current, erroneous English courtesy translation must yield to the Spanish text of Mexico’s declaration with respect to Article 10. Courts in the United States, and other English-speaking countries party to the Convention, should immediately recognize that the phrase “through diplomatic or consular agents” was mistakenly inserted into the English courtesy translation and interpret Mexico’s declaration with respect to Article 10 of the Convention without reference to that phrase.

the public order or individual guarantees to do so. The request must contain a description of the formalities whose application is sought for purposes of effecting service of the document.


119. Letter from Christophe Bernasconi to author, supra note 87, at 2.

120. Id. at 1–2.

121. Id. at 2.

122. Id. The “recent changes to the Mexican Constitution” appear to be the 2007 amendments to Article 76, pt. I of the Mexican Constitution. See Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos [Const.], as amended, artículo 76, fracción I, Diario Oficial de la Federación [D.O.] 2, 12 de febrero de 2007 (Mex.) (“Exclusive powers of the Senate are . . . to approve the international treaties and diplomatic conventions that the Federal Executive may sign, as well as its decision to terminate, denounce, suspend, modify, amend, withdraw reservations and formulate interpretive declarations concerning the same.”) (emphasis added) (author’s translation).

123. See discussion supra Part II. Alternatively, a court could follow one of the
Interpreted properly, Mexico’s declaration reflects opposition to service of process via any of the alternative channels in Article 10 of the Convention.

Fortunately, this interim solution is already under way. In *OGM, Inc. v. Televisa, S.A. de C.V.*,124 a federal district court in California acknowledged the error in the English courtesy translation of Mexico’s declaration and quashed service by international registered mail on a Mexican defendant.125 Citing and quoting a prepublication draft of this article,126 the court concluded that it was bound by the original Mexican declaration, not the “courtesy translation,” the U.S. State Department’s website, or the state or district court decisions relying on the courtesy translation and/or the U.S. State Department’s website. Accordingly, based on the original Mexican declaration, the Court concludes that Mexico has in fact objected to service through the alternative methods specified in Article 10 of the Hague Convention, and that service through Mexico’s Central Authority is the exclusive method by which Plaintiff can serve Televisa in Mexico.127

Because the plaintiffs had already requested service through Mexico’s Central Authority, the court properly denied the defendant’s request for a Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(5) dismissal and instead simply quashed the service by mail, effectively retaining the case to await the return of a certificate of service from the Central Authority under Article 6 of the Convention.128

*OGM v. Televisa* has attracted press attention129 and is already cited in two treatises.130 With the Department of State

---

125. *Id.* at *2–4.
126. *Id.* at *2–3 (citing and quoting with approval, *inter alia*, a prepublication version of the present article).
127. *Id.* at *3 (citations omitted).
130. See 3 VED P. NANDA & DAVID K. PANSIUS, LITIGATION OF INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES IN U.S. COURTS § 21:2 (2d ed. 2009) (“Notwithstanding contradictory materials on the State Department’s Web site, service by registered mail to Mexico under Article 10(a) was not permitted, Mexico having objected thereto.”); 1 Paul R.
now also recognizing that service through Mexico’s Central Authority “is the exclusive method available” under the Hague Service Convention, 131 other courts are sure to follow.

CONCLUSION

Mexico has objected to the alternative methods of service of process permitted under Articles 8 and 10 of the Hague Service Convention. Unfortunately, a translation mistake obscured the scope of Mexico’s objection and has misled courts and others in the United States to permit service by international registered mail or private process server in several cases. Service through Mexico’s Central Authority is effectively the exclusive means of service of process abroad on parties in Mexico under the Hague Service Convention. Accordingly, such service of process abroad should proceed through Mexico’s Central Authority in accordance with Articles 3 through 7 of the Convention.

KIESEL ET AL., MATTHEW BENDER PRACTICE GUIDE: CALIFORNIA PRETRIAL CIVIL PROCEDURE § 8.16[2][a] (2009) (“Mexico has in fact objected to service through the alternative methods specified in the Hague Convention, Art. 10. Therefore, service through Mexico’s Central Authority is the exclusive method by which a plaintiff can serve a defendant in Mexico.”).