



# Introduction to Swiss Civil Procedure

Prof. T. Domej

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## Legislation on civil procedure

- Swiss Code of Civil Procedure (Zivilprozessordnung, ZPO) 2008 [entry into force: 2011; reform 2023 [eif 2025]
- Swiss Debt Enforcement and Insolvency Act (Schuldbetreibungs- und Konkursgesetz, SchKG) 1889 [eif 1892] / major reform 1994 [eif 1997]
- Federal Patent Court Act (Bundespatentgerichtsgesetz, BPatGG) 2009 [eif 2010]
- [Federal Act on Federal Civil Procedure (Bundesgesetz über den Bundeszivilprozess, BZP)] 1947 [eif 1948]
- Swiss Federal Court Act (Bundesgerichtsgesetz, BGG) 2005 [eif 2007]
- Bundesgesetz über das Internationale Privatrecht (IPRG) 1987 [eif 1989]
- Cantonal legislation on court organisation and subject-matter jurisdiction (eg Court Organisation Act of the Canton of Zurich [GOG])

# Legislation on civil procedure

## Adjudication

Cantonal courts, Federal Patent Court:  
ZPO [/BPatGG]  
Federal court (appeals): BGG [/BZP]  
Federal court (1st instance): BZP

## Enforcement

Money claims: SchKG  
Non-money-claims: ZPO

Arbitration  
Domestic: ZPO  
International: IPRG

Insolvency: SchKG

# Civil courts

Federal Court (Bundesgericht)

2nd instance cantonal court

single-  
instance  
cantonal court

Federal Patent  
Court

1st instance  
cantonal court

[conciliation  
authority]

# Swiss judges

- Professional and lay judges
- Elections
- Influence of political parties

# Swiss lawyers

- Federal Act on the Free Movement of Lawyers (Bundesgesetz über die Freizügigkeit der Anwältinnen und Anwälte, BGFA)
- Cantonal rules on bar admission
- No requirement to be represented by a lawyer in civil proceedings
- Professional representation before courts: lawyers' monopoly
- Federal Court: representation only by lawyers (but litigants in person also admitted)

# Jurisdiction

- Subject-matter jurisdiction: determined by cantonal law within parameters set by ZPO
- Territorial jurisdiction
  - Traditional Swiss approach: defendant's domicile

## Article 30(2) Swiss Federal Constitution

Unless otherwise provided by law, any person against whom civil proceedings have been raised has the right to have their case decided by a court within the jurisdiction in which they reside.

- Influence of Lugano Convention
- Today: Many exceptions from domicile principle

# Mandatory conciliation

- Principle: mandatory pre-trial conciliation (with exceptions)
- About 50% of cases settled at conciliation stage
  - & large percentage of money claims filtered out through enforcement proceedings without prior judgment
- Cantonal rules on organisation of conciliation authority (court, justice of the peace, specialised administrative authority)
- Alternative: mediation (rarely used)



# Mandatory conciliation – possible outcomes

- dismissal for groundlessness (plaintiff's default)
- settlement, acceptance, withdrawal
  - same effect as binding judgment
- authorisation to proceed (*Klagebewilligung*)
  - case may be brought before court within 3 months (no automatic initiation of court proceedings!)
- judgment (*Entscheidung*)
  - up to 2000 CHF
  - claimant's request; discretion of conciliation authority
- proposed judgment (*Urteilsvorschlag*)
  - up to 5000 CHF (gender equality/tenancy: no upper limit)
  - From 2025: up to 10'000 CHF

# Proceedings before the trial court

- Ordinary procedure (*ordentliches Verfahren*)
  - claims over CHF 30'000 / claims without monetary value
  - often dominated by written elements
  - emphasis on formalities, strict party responsibility, *de facto* (but not *de iure*) necessity of representation by lawyer
- Simplified procedure (*vereinfachtes Verfahren*)
  - claims up to CHF 30'000 (some types of claims regardless of value)
  - less formal, more orality, more judicial involvement
- Summary procedure (*summarisches Verfahren*)
- Special procedures in family law matters

# Proceedings before the trial court

- Structure of ordinary proceedings
  - exchange of written statements
    - statement of claim, statement of defence
    - if ordered by court: replication [*Replik*], rejoinder [*Duplik*]
  - at court's discretion: instruction hearing (*Instruktionsverhandlung*)
  - main hearing (waiver by parties possible)

# Proceedings before the trial court

–New factual allegations and evidence

– two unrestricted opportunities

– two written statements for each party *or*

– one written statement for each party and instruction hearing where new allegations and evidence can be brought forward (*i.e. instruction hearing not restricted to e.g. settlement discussions*) *or*

– one written statement for each party and beginning of oral hearing

➤ from 2025: parties' first statements under Article 228(1) ZPO

## Proceedings before the trial court

- New factual allegations and evidence (continued)
  - admissibility of late allegations (Article 229(2),(2bis) ZPO)
    - newly-arising facts and evidence
    - pre-existing facts and evidence that could not have been introduced earlier despite reasonable diligence
    - new facts or evidence must be introduced within a deadline set by the court; in the absence of such a deadline, they must be introduced in the next hearing at the latest
  - latest possibility for all new facts and evidence: beginning of the deliberation of the judgment
  - where facts are established *ex officio*, new allegations and evidence are allowed until the beginning of the deliberation of the judgment without restriction

# Proceedings before the trial court

- Relationship between the judge and the parties
  - Formal aspects of proceedings (service of documents, scheduling hearings etc.): responsibility of court
  - Substantive case management?
    - principle of party presentation
    - duty to ask questions and give instructions (scope disputed; courts often reluctant, in particular towards parties represented by lawyers)
    - taking evidence *ex officio* (powers broad in theory, but rarely used in practice)

# Proceedings before the trial court

- Evidence
  - types of evidence enumerated in ZPO (witness testimony, documents, inspection, court-appointed experts, written statements, party interrogation)
  - no party-appointed experts (such expertise only qualifies as party's assertion, not as evidence)
    - from 2025: reports by party-appointed experts qualify as documentary evidence
  - free evaluation of evidence

# Proceedings before the trial court

- Evidence (continued)
  - duty to cooperate and right to refuse
    - unjustified refusal by party taken into account when appraising evidence
    - unjustified refusal by third party: compulsion
  - illegally obtained evidence: balancing of interests



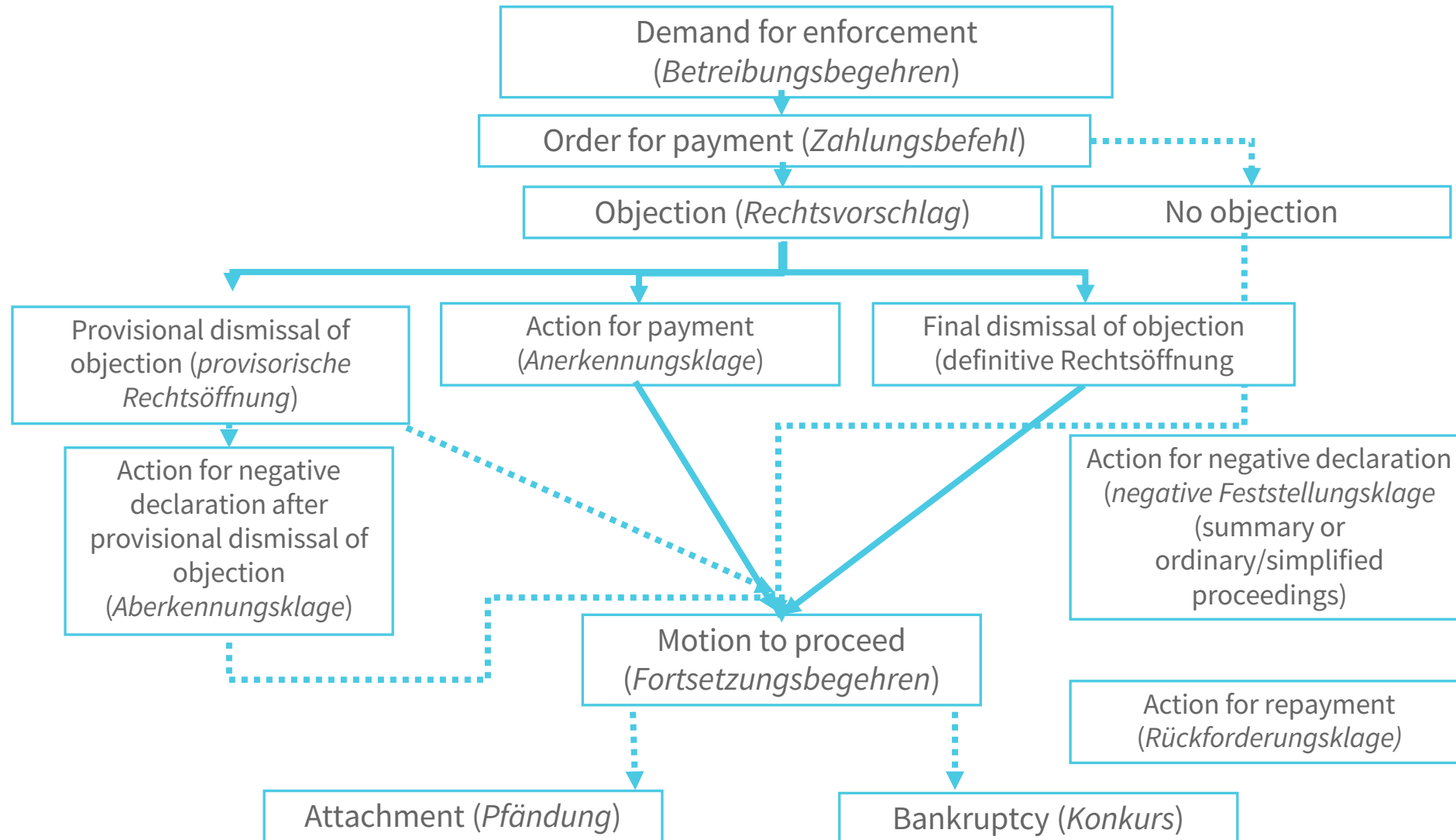
## Effects of judgments and settlements

- both judgments and settlements become *res judicata* (exact meaning for settlements unclear)
- settlement leads to termination of the proceedings *ipso iure* (i.e. without a judgment)
- *res judicata*
  - between the parties (*inter partes*)
  - limited to the object of the dispute (*Streitgegenstand*), no collateral estoppel/issue preclusion
- third-party intervention (*Nebenintervention*) and third-party notice (*Streitverkündung*): binding effect of reasons that are detrimental to the party in whose favour the third party intervened or who issued the notice (Articles 77 and 80 ZPO)

# Appeals against judgments

- Appeal (*Berufung*) and objection (*Beschwerde*) to higher cantonal court
  - depending on type of judgment and value of the dispute
  - appeal: full review
  - objection: full review on points of law; facts: only cases were “obviously incorrectly” established
- Civil appeal (*Beschwerde in Zivilsachen*) and subsidiary constitutional complaint (*subsidiäre Verfassungsbeschwerde*) to the Federal Court

# Enforcement of money debts



# Insolvency

- Bankruptcy proceedings as debt enforcement (for merchants/businesses; no requirement of insolvency)
- Bankruptcy proceedings without prior enforcement
  - at a creditor's demand
  - at the debtor's demand
- Composition proceedings (*Nachlassverfahren*)
- Distribution of assets
- After insolvency: “no new property” exception (but no discharge of residual debt [yet])