

## Introduction

Fundamental (human) rights are nowadays ubiquitous in the discourse of the Western world. It is no longer just about the rights of natural persons, but also of legal persons. It is not just public subjective rights that an individual can claim against public authorities, but also rights that are protected in horizontal relationships between individuals. According to some, human rights represent the only shared ideology in an otherwise relativistic, individualistic and hedonism-oriented liberal society.

We understand how important they are when they present a fragile backstop against cynical manipulation of individuals as mere instruments used in the interests of more powerful individuals or their differently conceived collective entities. At the same time, we see how problematic they are, if broadly conceived fundamental rights called for “by all against everyone” are of purely utilitarian use that further atomizes societies. This inherent tension makes them fragile. If they are to survive and serve well both individuals and their societies a sufficient number of people must take them seriously and understand them in correlation with the obligations and responsibilities not only of others but of everyone. Therefore, fundamental (human) rights have their philosophy, sociology and law, and quite naturally, they are more often than not subject to political disputes and academic dissertations.

The present volume obviously belongs to the category of academic dissertations. It was written by academics from several East-Central European countries. Every author chose his theme from the wide range of topics given by the joint title “Human rights in business”. Each of them treated his or her human rights topic from the national, European and sometimes wider international perspective. Their contributions thus confront national practices with standards of the UN, EU or ECHR, by analyzing statutory provisions and case law in areas such as social dialogue, privacy in the workplace, employment of persons with disabilities, as well as customers’ professionals’ and companies’ fundamental “market” rights etc.

Such variety of contributions shows that the common aim was not to elaborate the topic “Human rights in business” systematically, from a deep general theory, through an exhaustive analysis of all aspects, to the final report on the state of things in this area. The team’s ambition was more modest: bring the East-Central European

insight into the issues that are in international comparisons often treated from the perspective of large jurisdictions, i.e. of the legislation and legal practice of world or regional powers. Here, the problems of the “new EU Member States”, which are sometimes viewed only as apprentices of the West more or less successfully catching up with their more advanced tutors, are analyzed in detail and presented in their European or international context. The following contributions prove that in East-Central Europe solutions to contemporary problems are also being sought and that the experience of those countries can be internationally interesting and relevant.

And that is precisely the purpose of this volume dedicated to “Human rights in business”: to enable the “Eastern” states of the European Union to contribute to the debate on how to legally define and effectively enforce these rights in the 21st century world of business.

We end this brief editorial note with expressions of deep gratitude. We wish to thank the authors and various anonymous reviewers who willingly gave their time and expertise to contribute to the current volume.

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