
This timely book offers a comprehensive analysis of hate speech and human rights in the Czech and Slovak Republics; two post-communist countries which share a political, historical, social, and legal background. Viera Pejchal (Ph.D.), the author of the book, is a Human Rights Officer at the United Nations, and has in the past published on hate speech, human rights and extremism in international academic journals and Slovak newspapers and blogs. The book is based on the author's thesis (doctoral-Université de Genève, 2019) issued under the title: Hate speech regulation in post-communist countries: the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The acknowledgement section begins with a personal note: “This was my passionate endeavour to understand hate speech phenomena around the world and in the country into which I was born – Czechoslovakia.” She follows by listing several collaborators, including various Slovak and Czech national governmental, non-governmental and private institutions, before thanking a sizable list of people and family members.

The book *Hate Speech and Human Rights in Eastern Europe: Legislating for Divergent Values* consists of three interrelated but separate parts. Part I sets out the theoretical and philosophical framework for the study; Part II examines the international responses to the regulation of hate speech; and Part III focuses on the Czech and Slovak approach to hate speech. Some of the fundamental questions answered in the book are: What is hate speech? How is hate speech regulation linked to the protection of certain values in democratic societies? Is hate speech regulation different in Slovakia and Czech Republic? Is it different when compared to the international understanding of hate speech regulation?

Part I sets out its theoretical basis. It is divided into two chapters: 1) Hate Speech Regulation in Democracy and 2) The Historical, Political and Constitutional Context of The Czech and Slovak Republics. The challenge of hate speech regulation is that it must somehow balance two conflicting fundamental rights; the right to free speech and rights of minorities. As there is no universally agreed definition of hate speech, the author offers a three-prong theory - a theory of three independent, complementary, and equally important models of hate speech in relation to consequences of what hatred-fuelled speech seeks to incite: violence, discrimination, and denial of human dignity. The second chapter explains the pre-communist experience, communist legacy, and post-communist protection of minorities in both countries – the Czech and Slovak republics. Both republics use the term extremism as an umbrella for any form of hate crime and/or hate speech, and as a broad legal and political framework to regulate it. The author also points to two different understandings of hate speech based on the political and sociological differences between these two countries.

Part II focuses on the analysis of international standards and responses to regulation of hate speech. It applies a three-prong theory of hate speech to international law. This part consists of
three chapters: 1) The United Nations’ Treaty Response to Regulation of Hate Speech; 2) European Responses to Hate Speech Regulation; and 3) International Soft Law and the Regulation of Hate Speech. In the first chapter the focus is on international legally binding provisions related to regulation of hate speech, using a comparative approach with the aim of pointing out that the understanding of hate speech evolved over time, and the intervention to limit free speech has been justified by the protection of different goods – equality, human dignity, and public order from violence. The following chapter focuses on European binding treaties, where hate speech has been understood as anti-democratic and extremist speech which endangers social peace, security, freedom, and equality of member of society. The last part focuses on non-binding international documents, including, at the European level, the most recent Recommendation No.15 on Combating Hate speech.

Part III discusses the application of international legal framework in both the Czech and Slovak Republics, two countries that experienced different patterns of democratic development, which resulted in creating different responses to hate speech. This part consists of two chapters: 1) The Dawn of the Post-Communist Regulation of Hate Speech and 2) The Post-Communist Penal Regulation of Hate Speech. There are political and historical reasons for the use of the term extremism in the Czech and Slovak Republics, and according to the author, the Czech Republic has been more active in addressing the issue of extremism than Slovakia. The reason lies perhaps in different definitions of the term extremism in both countries, as explained in the book. The first chapter discusses the challenges of a proper implementation and understanding of core democratic values, such as freedom of expression and the protection of minorities in post-communist countries, where especially in Slovakia, under Mečiar’s authoritarian ruling, the relationship between the minority and majority were not addressed properly, resulting in a lack of understanding of human rights. The protection of the Roma community from bias violence, racism and hate speech remains among the most important human rights challenges in both countries. The last chapter focuses on the Penal regulation of Hate Speech and the application of the three-prong theory of hate speech in both countries based on legal regulations and judicial interpretation. Extremist crimes represent less than 1% of all committed crimes in the Czech and Slovak Republics, it is, therefore, recommendable to support and create a favourable environment for discussions about democracy and the values it stands for, keeping in mind the role the past had, including the communist and fascist government in Slovakia during World War II.

Even though the study is mainly based on analysing legal instruments and their application in case law and public policies, drawing on legal philosophy and political science, it also provides the reader with vital information in understanding hate speech concepts from a social and psychological perspective. It is an essential read for scholars of human rights law, NGOs, the media, and anyone who would like to understand the complex phenomenon of hate speech and the mechanisms underlying the circulation of hatred.

With the current rise of extremist and radical opinions in our societies, the study reminds us that the best indicator of the freedom inherent in a country is the extent to which security is enjoyed by minorities.
More than thirty years after the end of communistic rule, it is high time for the Czech and Slovak democracies to adopt a more active – value based – approach in the protection of human rights from hate speech. The book, soon to be translated in the Slovak/Czech languages, may be a good source for discussions, awareness-raising and educational programs in our countries.

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