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BRATISLAVA LEGAL FORUM 2024: THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN LAW ON THE NATIONAL LAW (BRATISLAVA, 17 – 19 SEPTEMBER 2024) / Laura Fotopulosová

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The international scientific conference Bratislava Legal Forum 2024 took place from 17 to 19 September 2024, traditionally held at the Faculty of Law of Comenius University Bratislava. The 10th anniversary edition was opened on Tuesday, 17 September 2024, with the plenary session of the conference with the central theme: *"The Impact of the European Law on the National Law"*. Eminent guests such as Ministers of Justice from the V4 countries, Presidents of the Supreme Courts from the V4 countries and Presidents of the Bar Associations from the V4 countries were invited to the plenary session. The event was organised thanks to the support of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) and the Central European Foundation (CEF).

The conference was opened by the Rector of Comenius University Bratislava, prof. JUDr. Marek Števíček, DrSc., who delivered a solemn speech and thus officially opened the plenary session. In his speech, he drew attention to the fact that, in addition to climate change, we are also experiencing a change in the social climate. As the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic was an important partner of the event, the Minister Juraj Blanár, also delivered opening remarks during the plenary session. In conclusion, Minister Blanár expressed his wish that the Bratislava Legal Forum would become a European-wide legal conference.

The opening ministerial panel of the conference with the central theme *"20 Years of EU Membership: The Impact of the EU on the Justice Area"*, whose main partner was the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, was moderated by the Dean of the Faculty of Law of the Comenius University Bratislava, prof. JUDr. Eduard Burda, PhD. The guests of the first panel discussion were JUDr. Boris Susko, PhD. (Minister of Justice of the Slovak Republic), Dr. Bence Tuzson (Minister of Justice of Hungary), JUDr. Vilém

Anzenbacher, Ph.D. et Ph.D. (Deputy Minister of Justice of the Czech Republic) and Zuzanna Rudzińska-Bluszcz (State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Poland). During this panel discussion, the participants discussed the impact of EU law on national legal orders, the question of interpretation of EU law or judicial law-making. The Minister of Justice of the Slovak Republic stated that in some cases there is a conflict between the case law of the CJEU and the case law of the constitutional courts of the Member States. He also stated that the biggest future challenges will be both the gradual digitalisation and the progress in the sphere of technology, which legal regulation has not yet kept pace with. In their speeches, all present assessed the functioning of the EU legal system in their respective countries and commented on both the positives and negatives of membership. Rudzińska-Bluszcz noted that the EU no longer has the same shape as it had twenty years ago and pointed to several changes that have taken place during that period. She said that there is increased cooperation between states within the EU and there is also harmonisation of laws based on European values. Subsequently, in the discussion, the Dean of the Faculty of Law of Comenius University Bratislava, prof. JUDr. Eduard Burda, PhD. asked a question to the participants of the discussion: "Where do you see areas of law that are over-regulated by the EU and where, on the contrary, do you see areas that still require some degree of European regulation in order to function properly and efficiently?" From the discussion, it became clear that it is necessary to examine the case report and, based on it, to determine which areas of legislation need to be regulated. At the same time, it is important to focus on the consolidation of national legislation in the areas of cultural and ethical issues, family law and justice, with the need for further regulation in the area of digitalisation and the online space. Participants also pointed out that the EU produces a large amount of legislation that creates a confusing web of legal systems. They concluded the topic by stating that EU legislation should be adapted to the 21st century and move forward by anticipating and predicting certain social phenomena in the future.

The second panel discussion with the central theme "*The impact of European Union membership on the functioning of the Supreme Judicial Institutions*", the main partner of which was the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic, was moderated by prof. JUDr. Juraj Vačok, PhD. from the Department of Administrative and Environmental Law of the Faculty of Law of Comenius University Bratislava. The panellists in this session were JUDr. Ján Šikuta, PhD. (President of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic), JUDr. Petr Angyalossy, Ph.D. (President of the Supreme Court of the Czech Republic) and prof. Dr. András Zs. Varga (President of the Supreme Court of Hungary). One of the topics addressed in the panel discussion was judicial independence and the influence of the EU, with the resulting message of the discussion in this area being that EU accession had no impact on judicial independence. In this panel discussion, the panellists also addressed the impact of EU law on the decision-making of the supreme courts, the digitalisation and modernisation of the judiciary and the impact of EU membership on the process of digitalisation and modernisation of the judiciary, or the control of the judiciary and the role of the supreme courts in the process of control. One of the important ideas presented in this panel discussion was the importance of cooperation between national courts and the CJEU in order to ensure the uniformity of case law and therefore that decisions are in line with EU law.

The last discussion in the plenary session, whose main partner was the Slovak Bar Association, was moderated by Assoc. Prof. JUDr. Ondrej Laciak, PhD. from the Department of Criminal Law, Criminology and Criminalistics of the Faculty of Law of Comenius University Bratislava, who solemnly welcomed the panellists JUDr. Martin Puchalla, PhD. (President of the Slovak Bar Association) and Dr. András Szecskoy (Vice

President of the Hungarian Bar Association). The main topic of the plenary session was twenty years of advocacy in the European Union, and the discussion touched upon several topics, such as the free movement of lawyers within the EU and their regulation, the status of bar associations within the Visegrad Four countries, the ethics of the advocate and the question of whether the legal profession should be regulated by a professional organisation. The President of the Slovak Bar Association JUDr. Martin Puchalla, PhD. stated that he perceived international cooperation as indispensable, highlighting the Council of European Bar Associations (hereinafter referred to as the "CCBE"), of which the Slovak Bar Association is a member, and stated that the CCBE has an important position within the European legislation. He further noted that during the 20 years of membership of the European Union, the legal profession had acquired a new dimension, which included the free movement of lawyers as well as the free provision of legal services within the EU. At the level of the European Union, he highlighted the beneficial legislation concerning the procedural rights of suspects and accused persons, but at the same time pointed out the negative aspect of the lack of reflection on the existing principles without which advocacy cannot function. Principles such as institutional independence or confidentiality must be preserved and cannot be interfered with in any way. In his speech, Dr. András Szecskay briefly presented a more comprehensive picture of the status system of lawyers in Hungary, and positively assessed the fact that the practice of law in Hungary is linked to compulsory membership. He concluded the discussion with the ethical dilemmas arising in the context of EU membership.

The second day of the conference (Wednesday, 18 September 2024) was devoted to proceedings in professional sections, with more than 240 participants attending sessions in these 11 sections. The themes of the sections were mostly thematically linked to the central theme of the conference "*The Impact of the European Law on the National Law*".

The final day of the conference (Thursday, 19 September 2024) was devoted to the presentation of conclusions from the plenary session and from the negotiations of individual sections presented by panel moderators and section guarantors.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the international scientific conference Bratislava Legal Forum annually serves as an important platform for the exchange of theoretical and practical knowledge between representatives of various legal professions. It plays an essential role in the exchange of knowledge among the participants, providing a space for deep reflection in the framework of discussion, which ensures significant professional development of the conference participants. As the professional part of the conference was complemented by a rich social programme, it also presents a unique opportunity for networking, which can open up new opportunities for the participants in their academic and professional development. The annual success and interest in the international scientific conference Bratislava Legal Forum reflects the commitment of the organisers and participants, who together contribute to the development of professional dialogue within the legal community.

