

# Introduction

In 2012 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences established the Media Studies Research Group for the management of various social scientific research activities related to the media. Activities related to media law are of paramount importance among these, not least because of the rapid and major changes taking place in the field of media regulations, the many open questions that arise both at the national and the European level and the disputes related to the media regulations. The Academy hopes that this initiative will enable the research team to conduct studies that are significant on a European scale, as well as to participate in international exchanges related to the subject.

In 2013 the research group launched a research programme in law entitled “The fundamentals of European thought on media law”, which is scheduled to run until 2016. The programme includes the publication of several independent papers and volumes of studies, as well as the organisation of conferences. It consists of several research projects covering several distinct legal fields. We hope that this diverse approach will allow both the researchers and their readers to distinguish the fundamentals of European thought on media law, to identify the possible models for the resolution of the various questions that arise, to understand the “common minimum” of European regulations that is present in all countries and to establish whether “best practices” exist in these areas and, if so, what they are. Besides identifying the various European approaches, it is at least as important to examine the legal system of the United States and, possibly, some other legal systems that are relevant from the European viewpoint, and to study the interactions between them.

The Academy invited distinguished scholars from many countries working in the field of media and free speech law to take part in the research programme and to send manuscripts for a planned publication of a collection of essays. The participation of diverse authors from various countries and backgrounds has greatly contributed to the value of the research.

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The book entitled *Media Freedom and Regulation in the New Media World* (Budapest: Wolters Kluwer, 2014) was published in 2014 as a result of the research team’s work. The studies included in this book were also presented by the authors themselves at a conference held in Budapest in April 2015 (the video recordings of the lectures are

available at [www.newmediaworld.hu](http://www.newmediaworld.hu)). And now a new, even thicker book is about to be published, the continuation of the first volume, presenting chapters addressing a great variety of media law and freedom of speech issues.

The book is composed of six larger structural units dealing with (1) the fundamental theoretical questions of freedom of the press, (2) the regulation of new media, (3) the legal status of journalists, (4) the means available to the European Union to safeguard and regulate freedom of the press, as well as the eternal, fundamental questions of freedom of speech, (5) the law on defamation and the protection of privacy, and lastly, (6) the limitation of hate speech, including the problems related to blasphemy and “denial laws”.

The authors are, without exception, noted and recognised experts in their respective fields; scholars and university lecturers. We are greatly honoured they accepted the invitation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to participate in this project. It is a special privilege that many authors from the United States accepted our invitation as well. The legal approach and jurisprudence of the USA have an unquestionable role in European freedom of the press-related legal thinking, even though the solutions chosen in the different European legal systems or in the European Union often greatly differ from the legal solutions applied overseas.

Since the authors come from numerous different countries, their viewpoints are also quite diverse and multifaceted. The texts address the most topical and important issues of media regulation and freedom of speech, including (among others), the legal liability of the intermediaries in the media market (Internet service providers, search engines) or even the legal perception of drones, being one of the new technical tools available to journalists, not to mention the questions put into the limelight again as a result of the *Charlie Hebdo* murders. Several of the papers focus on the legal problems related to the ‘new media’, i.e. the services available on the Internet. Another part of the questions examined is not new, but still, given the modern, Western approach to freedom of the press, it cannot be circumvented. These issues, such as the limits of freedom of speech or the latest adjustments and amendments to the democratic freedom of the press theory, need to be scrutinised time and time again.

Freedom of the press and media regulation in democratic countries, by their nature, cannot be static, but are constantly changing. Still, a book such as this one must be closed and delivered to the readers at some point. Nevertheless, the editor of this volume can do so with the reassuring thought that the conclusions drawn in these studies will defy time and remain valid for a long time. These writings not only keep for posterity a specific part of the current scholarly standpoints and record a snapshot of the cross-section of current press freedom-related issues, but also they can even actively form scholarly and public thinking about these questions. We hope they will prove to be a great source, thanks to their conclusions standing the test of time, for international readers, such as researchers, university students and media policy decision-makers, who are interested in the legal aspects of freedom of the press.

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