

THE EU
CHARTER OF
FUNDAMENTAL
RIGHTS

A Commentary

SECOND EDITION

Edited by
Steve Peers, Tamara Hervey,
Jeff Kenner and Angela Ward



THE EU CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

This second edition of the first commentary of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in English, written by experts from several EU Member States, provides an authoritative but succinct statement of how the Charter impacts upon EU, domestic and international law.

Following the conventional article-by-article approach, each commentator offers an expert view of how each article is either already being interpreted in the courts, or is likely to be interpreted. Each commentary is referenced to the case law and is augmented with extensive references to further reading. This is a much-welcomed new edition of the authoritative guide to the Charter.

Second Edition

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and
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Foreword

KOEN LENAERTS*

It is now just over a decade since the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union entered into force together with the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, as primary EU law on an equal footing with the EU Treaties. It is, moreover, just over two decades since the Charter was first proclaimed as an indicative catalogue of rights at Nice on 7 December 2000. Of course, fundamental rights protection in the law of the Union predates the Charter, having been recognised as a general principle of law over fifty years ago, first in 1969 in *Stauder v City of Ulm*¹ and then even more explicitly a year later in the *Internationale Handelsgesellschaft* case.² However, there is no doubt that the Charter has, particularly since its formal entry into force, afforded much greater visibility to the rights that it protects and, in so doing, has significantly enhanced legal certainty for those seeking to rely on those rights.

The timeliness of the Charter's elevation to primary law status can hardly be over-estimated. Europe, and indeed the wider world, face myriad and ever-greater fundamental rights challenges. Authoritarian regimes the world over are increasingly strident and open in their disregard for fundamental rights and in their insistence that the way in which they treat their own citizens is no one else's business. The ubiquity of digital communications has also raised new and difficult issues surrounding respect for fundamental rights, in particular as regards the right to respect for private and family life and the right to the protection of personal data, not only by State authorities but also by private corporations which may well be headquartered outside the jurisdiction in which the effects of alleged breaches of those rights are being felt. The need to 'lock down' entire societies in the face of the ongoing global pandemic – a development that is unprecedented in modern times – has also thrown into sharp relief the potential fragility of rights and freedoms that were previously taken for granted in democratic societies, as decision-makers have grappled with the competing imperatives of respect for those rights and freedoms, on the one hand, and of the need to prioritise public health and to save lives, on the other. As the European Union has confronted these challenges, the Charter has served as an anchor in troubled waters, providing all three branches of government, at both European and Member State level, with an indispensable tool for ensuring that all action undertaken under Union law remains grounded in the values on which the Union is founded.

This Commentary, to which several dozen of the most distinguished lawyers and academics from across Europe, including a number of my judicial colleagues at the Court of Justice, have contributed will, in my opinion, provide invaluable assistance to all those seeking to carry out the vital work of putting the Charter's provisions into effect. In practical terms, Part I will be of particular value to those who wish to ascertain the specific scope and meaning of the provisions

* President of the Court of Justice of the European Union and Professor of European Union Law, University of Leuven.

¹ Judgment of 12 November 1969, *Stauder v City of Ulm*, Case 29–69, EU:C:1969:57.

² Judgment of 17 December 1970, *Internationale Handelsgesellschaft*, Case 11–70, EU:C:1970:114.

of the Charter. Each Charter article is analysed in turn, taking account of its wording, context and objectives, as well as the relevant case law of the CJEU that has interpreted it. Whether practicing lawyer, academic researcher, or interested European citizen, anyone who wishes to learn more about the rights that are protected by the Charter, and the way in which it operates to ensure such protection in practice, will, I believe, find answers to his or her questions in the pages of this part of the Commentary.

Part II, to which I myself have contributed a chapter, seeks to take a step back and to provide a more reflective and contextual overview of particular aspects of the operation of the Charter. Each chapter approaches the Charter from a different analytical standpoint. While some authors focus on fundamental rights protection in specific fields or on particular aspects of that protection that are currently dominating the case law – in particular, the law of international protection, developments relating to the principle of mutual trust, fundamental social rights and the obligation to provide effective remedies to enforce Charter rights – others explore the interaction between the Charter, as the catalogue of fundamental rights applicable under EU law, and systems of national or international law.

Finally, Part III of the Commentary contains one single contribution assessing an important subject tangential to the Charter, namely the prospects for EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, in accordance with Article 6(2) TEU.

In conclusion, the Commentary provides a comprehensive guide to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union from a broad range of different perspectives and I thoroughly recommend it to anyone who has an interest, whether practical or academic, in the application of fundamental rights in the EU legal order.

Editor's Preface Second Edition

Fundamental human rights. The phrase resonates in so many ways – historically, politically, socially, rhetorically, and legally. The notion of inalienable rights, which inhere in human beings merely by reason of their humanity, and apply regardless of nationality, race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and other categories, is not only a crucial part of Europe's history, and its emergence from its dark past of the early 20th century. It is also an essential touchstone in contemporary times: we cannot assume that striving for equal dignity for all human beings, and constraining the power of those who govern, is somehow no longer necessary. A global pandemic is just one of the challenges of the first part of the 21st century in which human rights have a critical role to play. Other challenges include how best to uphold the rule of law in contemporary democratic societies, where populism seems to be enjoying renewed voter support – a matter on which courts across the globe, including the CJEU, are being invited to rule. The contemporary contexts are of course important, but our core focus here is EU human rights law. While originally the Council of Europe was the institutional context for the development of human rights in Europe, the EU became involved in human rights from at least the 1970s onwards. This initial development, however, was in the context of the CJEU's jurisprudence, rather than in a single human rights instrument such as the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, or European Social Charter. It was not until the late 1990s that the idea of a fundamental rights instrument for the EU was realised in practice.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which enshrines certain civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights in EU law, was given full legal effect by the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009. This brief description belies a long and convoluted journey which began with a decision of the European Council in 1999 to draw up a Charter of Fundamental Rights and resulted quite quickly in the publication of a first draft in 2000. By December 2000, the Charter had been enshrined in the Treaty of Nice. But between 2001 and 2004 the Charter became enmeshed in the ultimately unsuccessful effort to introduce an EU Constitutional Treaty, and by the end of 2004, with votes in the Netherlands and France having gone against the Constitutional Treaty, it appeared that the Charter would remain forever in legal limbo. Remarkably, it was revived by the Treaty of Lisbon, which at the same time provided for the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights. Although the latter has not taken place, the place of the Charter in EU law is now secure: the Charter provides a standard against which the EU institutions, and, in some circumstances, institutions of the Member States are held to account.

The rhetorical power of human rights is undeniable. But in this book, our focus is on their legal status. The idea that human beings have rights that are legally enforceable against institutions of public power (typically, institutions of government in a state) is one of the most powerful aspects of human rights. Human rights thus embody important constitutional principles, including the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. These principles are far from secure in contemporary Europe: human rights vigilance constitutes an important tool against excesses of power. As the EU has taken on greater public authority, particularly in areas where its actions affect matters that profoundly relate to human beings (such as their freedoms, dignity, and equality), the need for subjecting the EU's decision-making to human rights review

has become ever more pressing. Whatever doubts may have existed about the importance or legal status of the Charter during the early years of its gestation and infancy, there can be no doubt that it now plays this important role. Having come of age, the Charter now takes its place among the catalogue of international human rights instruments.

Each of the general editors of this volume has long been concerned with understanding the Charter and we have all written, spoken and taught about it; in Angela's case, before working at the CJEU, she advised clients on its impact and appeared as counsel in leading human rights cases. In 2003, when the shape of the Charter was known but its ultimate fate remained unclear, two of us, Tammy and Jeff, writing in the Foreword to the book *Economic and Social Rights under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* (Oxford, Hart, 2003) wondered whether "the inclusion of economic and social rights in the Charter would signal a change of status of these values within the EU's legal order?" Only months later, Steve and Angela, writing in the Foreword to the book *The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: Politics, Law and Policy* (Oxford, Hart, 2004) expressed the opinion that "the Charter seems set to play an increasingly pivotal role in the development of the complex legal and constitutional order of the European Union". It turns out we were both right and wrong. Right because the Charter has assumed huge significance within the EU legal order, wrong perhaps in anticipating that the status of social rights would change quite so fundamentally. But as many of the commentaries in this book demonstrate, there have been significant changes, even in the field of social rights.

What this Second Edition of our Commentary demonstrates most emphatically, and to our great delight, is the depth of scholarship that has developed around the Charter. When we began this project we had hoped to assemble an expert team to help us; what became apparent very quickly was that we were able to attract many of the best and most interesting scholars currently at work in European law and human rights. We have been fortunate to retain most of the authors from the first edition, and to add some outstanding new contributors. Working on the project during a global pandemic was far from easy. Many of us were juggling teaching and meetings from home, home schooling and other caring duties, alongside our research commitments. The text of this Second Edition reflects developments up to May 2021, which is the date on which our contributors were last invited to amend their chapters. To all our contributors, those who accepted our invitation to update their earlier work, and those who for various reasons were unable to join us this time, but on whose earlier work we build for the Second Edition: sincere and most heartfelt thanks. It is with a suitable sense of awe that we now stand back and admire your craftsmanship and skill. The Charter is a major part of the landscape of EU law, and our contributing authors have provided a sparkling examination of it.

The book has more than 50 contributing authors, which means that our list of thank yous and acknowledgements is inevitably a long one. First and foremost we thank our authors, who without exception accepted our invitation to contribute without hesitation, and who have brought an infectious enthusiasm to the project. We cannot single out authors for individual praise, but we thank Elspeth Guild for putting at our disposal her firm's office in London, where our first editorial planning meeting, for the first edition, took place, and Richard Hart, for his enthusiastic backing of such a gargantuan project in the form of an Article by Article commentary on the Charter, at the project's genesis. We also thank former President Skouris and President Lenaerts of the CJEU, who each have kindly accepted our invitation to write the Forewords for the first and second editions respectively, and who have supported the project since its inception. We have leaned heavily on our publisher, whose staff has been exemplary in their professionalism and skill; Sinead Moloney and Richard Cox at Hart Publishing, as well as Christopher Long who copy edited the book, have all made signal and vital contributions. We are particularly grateful to Sinead for her patience, especially during the pandemic's early months.

Editor's Preface Second Edition

Finally, and with sincere apologies to anyone whose contribution we may have inadvertently overlooked, we thank our families and colleagues for their forbearance and support during the long and occasionally stressful process of bringing the Second Edition of this gargantuan book to completion.

Tamara Hervey, Jeff Kenner, Steve Peers and Angela Ward

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