

William R. Slomanson: Fundamental Perspectives on International Law

Review by Anikó Raisz

The fifth edition of the *Fundamental Perspectives on International Law* by Slomanson (2007, Thomson Wadsworth) is a profound survey of the main fields of international law. The author, professor of the Thomas Jefferson School of Law in San Diego, California uses his own system creating logic and structure in international law which could be of special interest for those having a well-based continental structure in mind.

After clarifying the – for international lawyers well-known – question of ‘What is International Law?’, the author deals with the subjects of international law such as states, organizations as well as individuals and corporations. Almost following the traditional logic of jurisprudence, he runs on territorial and sovereignty questions in the next chapters. Reaching that what could be called ‘relationships in international law’ as a general topic, he describes diplomatic relations, treaties and the ways of dispute settlement, to arrive at its final point: the question of the use of force. These chapters have presented with a dynamic analysis the diverse mechanics of international law. The remaining chapters deal with ‘cross-cutting themes’, namely human rights, environment and economic relations (containing the WTO), some domains where the most actual problems of international law occur nowadays.

The book is not a traditional collection of pieces of information. It is coloured by interesting additional pieces of information (unequivocally separated, however closely related) such as the brief description of the US-China conflict concerning human rights, or information on the Islamic legal philosophy’s connection to human rights. He inserts fractions of works of other authors when related, giving a more general view of the issue.

The book is highly readable, as originally marked out for educational purposes. Nevertheless, the author successfully makes the reader forget this character. He tries to avoid becoming a book of predominantly academic or historical character, as already set out by the author himself in chapter one. Consequently, besides the theoretical basis, it touches upon practical problems as well, showing the complexity of international law. It describes e.g. among the different approaches to international law also the negation of its existence, mentioning the latest historical examples of this approach, like China or the Soviet Union. The book does not avoid discussing such highly actual and problematic questions as the notion of ‘civilized nations’ or the recent events in Sierra Leone or Iraq, nor the problems of the United Nations.

The book reacts to the actual phenomena of international law and so deals with subjects such as the growing role of non-state actors, or the relationship between human rights and economical growth. It adapts the relevant bibliography, does not fail to mention or briefly

describe international legal issues of other continents (such as the European Union or the Andean Court of Justice), although the author sometimes cannot deprive himself from the American point of view, which could be even more interesting for an inquisitive reader coming from the Old Continent, e.g. as for the case-studies of different, international law-related affairs before the US higher courts. The continuous reference in the textbook to internet-homepages on jurisprudential cases, scientific background or different documents adopted by states or international organizations is the other big advantage – for students as well as for practitioners.