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## HOW DO THE “BALKAN” BOYCOTT OF TRADE CHAINS AND EUROPEAN REGULATIONS ON UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES IN SUPPLY CHAINS AFFECT CONSUMER RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF CONTRACT?

**Summary:** *The authors examine in this paper the relationship between the principle of freedom of contract and various measures to prevent uncontrolled price increases for basic products in the countries of our region (by our region, we mean the countries of the former Yugoslav federation) The authors analyze the period from January 2025 and the measures to limit prices and margins for certain products and services, which the countries of our region adopted after the “Balkan boycott of retail chains.” In parallel, the paper analyzes the implementation of EU legal regulations for ensuring fair trade practices in the supply chain of agricultural and food products, where large retail chains are given new responsibilities In the Republic of North Macedonia, the implementation of EU regulations for fair trade practices in supply chains is presented as a way to achieve lower prices for basic products for consumers.*

*What was happening at the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025 in the market for agricultural, food, and other basic products (which make up the so-called consumer basket) in most Balkan countries? Several related conditions can be identified: the extremely rapid increase in prices of agricultural, food, and basic products-and the value of the consumer basket; consumers organized a boycott of large supermarkets; governments fixed the prices of certain products and services; some countries passed new or amended existing laws to ensure fair business practices; there was increased supervision by market and other inspection bodies; increased activity of bodies/commissions for the protection of competition; greater attention was paid to financial discipline; and changes were made in tax and customs policy All these events, and their impact on the basic principles of contract law in a market economy, on the protection of competition, and on the protection of consumer rights, inspired the authors to write this paper.*

*The paper is divided into seven parts In the Introduction, the authors explain the motive for writing the paper and the complexity of the situation that has arisen in our region, conditioned by the action of various factors, as well as possible solutions for the long-term resolution of the problem In the following parts of the paper, the authors discuss the characteristics of modern contract law Then, they address the problem of limiting the freedom of contract as one of the most important principles of contract law, stemming from the autonomy of the will The authors examine the limits of the freedom of contract in regulations for the protection of fair trade practices in the supply chain of agricultural and food products They also discuss what these regulations mean for the market economy and free competition, as well as measures of state interventionism by limiting prices and margins of certain products and when such measures are justified and permitted The aim is to indicate that the legally prescribed limits of the principle of freedom of contract can lead to the realization of other important principles of contract law: equality of contractual parties, the principles of conscientiousness and honesty, or the prohibition of abuse of rights The authors also point out that the so-called “Balkan boycott of large markets” has caused certain reactions from both the state and traders However, what the effects are and will be, and whether certain benefits for consumers will last, remains to be seen, and only time will tell In the Concluding Remarks, the authors describe the experiences in the Republic of North Macedonia with the short-term implementation of new*

*regulations for the protection of fair trading practices, competition law, and consumer law Likewise, in the concluding remarks, the authors indicate which authorities in the countries of the region can and should be maximally engaged in fulfilling their tasks and powers in order to help reduce, if not entirely stop, the increase in prices.*

**Keywords:** *contract law, freedom of contract, fair business practice, equality of contractual parties, competition, supervisory authorities, traders in the supply chain, consumer rights*