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Book Review: Vasile Pușcaș, *EU Accession Negotiations (A Handbook)*, Wien: Hulla&Co Human Dynamics KG, 2013, 216 pp.

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20 years of Copenhagen criteria - A Handbook on EU Accession Negotiations

Some of the scholars compare the European negotiations with a process, which requires abilities and skills to survive and a specific pedagogy designed especially to help perform better, and in turn compare Brussels with an “arena” or a “a small world of its own”. The EU decision makers have the opportunity to experience the game spirit, the businesslike or bargaining atmosphere, the interpersonal communication enhanced by cultural and background diversity, as well as the cobweb of home-made rules with which to muddle through diversified preferences and interests.

Nowadays, European negotiations mean learning tools, knowledge of negotiation and game theory, application of procedures, the use of position papers and background dossiers, interpersonal communication, politically correct behavior and a diplomatic language.

The handbook of the Chief Negotiator for Romania’s Accession to the EU (2000-2004), professor Vasile Pușcaș, Ph.D., offers all of the elements mentioned above and also the knowledge and technical support for the formation of the essential requirements of an European accession negotiator: strategy orientation, diplomatic mind and “language”, and a clear view on what it needs to be done.

The transfer of the know-how regarding the EU accession negotiations could be considered as the main motivation of this handbook. As the author himself mentioned, this book took shape during the session of training of the negotiating team of candidate countries from the Western Balkans, in which he is actively involved. The handbook contains the experience of a practitioner in the fields of European negotiations and diplomacy and the approach of a dedicated scholar to the field of international relations, reflected in his published books and articles.

The understanding of the process of accession negotiations, of decision making at the European level regarding its policies (especially the enlargement

policy), the development of a critical thinking and of an interdisciplinary approach of a certain subject constituted the main aims for the appearance of this handbook.

The handbook is very well structured, following a model of constructive thinking, supporting the readers to build up their own knowledge and to develop their own negotiating abilities.

All of the chapters of the handbook were designed as a guide, which will give the technical dimension of what the accession negotiations meant. From the beginning, the handbook provides a clear picture of the approach of the European Union, seen as a *continuous process of negotiations*. Then, it continues with the presentation of the main EU institutions and policies. The decision-making at the EU level represents an important chapter, which supports the understanding of the mechanism of the accession negotiations.

The description of the European negotiations from chapter 5 is linking the theory and practice of negotiation with the enlargement policy, in order to provide the necessary information for understanding how complex was the process that shaped decisions at the European level, and how it is possible to effectively participate in them.

The institutional framework and actors which are involved in the European accession negotiations are mentioned in the following chapters. It is important to have an interactive view on the process, and to find out the mechanism which is functioning between the working groups, the line ministries, the representatives of civil society and of interests groups, as well as the importance of the negotiating team and the authority of Chief Negotiator.

But the core of the handbook is composed from the four chapters which describe the strategies and tactics used in the accession negotiations; the position papers/negotiating position; the derogations and transition periods and the final stage of accession negotiations. These chapters are very technical, and managed to offer a practical guide to be followed in the process.

The complex view on the accession negotiation is finalized by the chapter on effective implementation of the negotiated commitments and the EU rules, which comes naturally to complete the approach of the subject of the handbook and to demonstrate that the European integration is a process of Internal Commitment.

The study case and the annexes included in the volume were designed for a better enhancing of the knowledge offered throughout the handbook.

The handbook is written in a pedagogical, deductive style, which is direct, clear and complete, succeeding in bridging the theory with the practice and the general with the specific.

The EU Accession negotiations (A Handbook) is a very good initiative of the RENA program for the states of the Western Balkans, which are preparing their accession, and for that reason I strongly recommend this useful tool to the governments and to the negotiating teams from these countries. Also, the academic community is honored and proud to receive this “example of lived history”, because only this experience could certify the quality of the information and of the examples given in the content of this handbook. Nevertheless, the handbook is a good guide for the students from the field of international relations and European studies, as well as for the general public interested in this particular topic.

