

CROATIAN ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION: The Challenges of Participation, ed. K. Ott, Volume Four, Institute of Public Finance and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Zagreb, 395 pp.

Review*

Five years ago the Institute of Public Finance started off a project entitled Croatian Accession to the European Union, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. In the meantime a number of extremely valuable publications edited by Katarina Ott have appeared, the last one for the present being the fourth volume - including thirteen new papers by eighteen authors. In this fourth book the accession process is considered from the perspective of current challenges of participation for a candidate country that has started off negotiations and that is passing through a very vigorous period of transformation and the adjustment of its economy and society in accordance with the standards, principles and expectations of the European Union. All the stakeholders, from the public administration, employees, employers, citizens, students, scientists, pensioners and others with good reason seek information that is as of high quality and relevant as possible about what accession is going to mean for the quality of their business and private lives. In fact, what the reform process is going to mean to the citizenry, how European citizenship is legally defined and what the perceptions and stances of the citizens concerning the European Union constitute an important part of the contents of this book. Based on five years work on this project, the Institute of Public Finance has published its best and most mature volume. This high rating is the outcome of an accumulated experience, as well as care invested in the process of selecting author's contributions and a high level of design and illustration of the book.

The book starts with a personal contribution by the editor, who in a review article sums up results of the project and puts forward major contributions of every single author, as well as giving her own view on problems, constraints, solutions and opportunities concerning the "challenges of participation" that Croatia and its citizens are faced with in the accession procedure. From her standpoint of a neutral position of a scientist using analytical and critical consideration, she points out very clearly that to date benefits of the accession process can be seen in the development of institutions aimed to the functioning

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of modern and open societies, irrespective of an ultimate outcome of the negotiations and any referendum. She predicts the key problems in an insufficient communication of the idea of European integration to the public, as well as in the insufficiently qualitative application and implementation of reform adjustments. She justly points out that Croatia's entering speed into the EU should be harmonised with its absorptive capacity for adoption and implementation of reforms, as otherwise the most important objective will be missed, being it the substantial advance and/or a high quality effect of the reforms.

The contributions of single authors can be classified into three groups of subjects. The first is dealing with communicational challenges; the second deals with challenges of perception and formation of viewpoints of members of the public; and the third, which considers the Lisbon objectives in selected sectoral areas.

In the first group of subjects, authors Tomislav Maršić, Petra Leppee Fraize, Igor Vidačak and Snježana Vasiljević address the issues of speed and negotiations quality, issues of how European topics are communicated to the public, questions on legitimate articulation and representation of interests of the stakeholders, as well as issues on how to define a concept of the European citizenship. In an interesting paper concerning the negotiations, Tomislav Maršić gives a parallel review of the negotiation models of some of the new members and Croatia. The research indicates constraints to be faced with concerning discrepancies between the local wishes and European Union objectives. Justification of key message is that quality negotiations and reforms should have priority over observing a forced deadline for formal membership. On the other hand, the research of Petra Lepee Fraize shows how important it is communicating with public during the integration process, and how helpful it can be in gaining public support. Even the elder member states are facing this problem, which shows to the new member states and candidate countries the extent of power and influence of communicating European issues has at the national and the European level. In doing so, certain interest parties inside the society also have a need to generate their own legitimate communication channels, which enable them to express and put forward their ideas, viewpoints and demands. Igor Vidačak explains how important such modern forms of lobbying and representation of interests are for the development of democratic practice, and how much an introduction of such a practice would mean for political decision making in Croatia. From a legal point of view, Snježana Vasiljević explains that European citizenship represents a new institute in European law which is still under development, being equally important for the policy of citizenship of the European Union as well as for the national policies of protection of fundamental human rights.

The second group of subjects, written by Aleksandar Štulhofer, Dragan Bagić and Ante Šalinović, Ljiljana Kaliterna Lipovčan and Zvezdana Prizmić Larsen, deals with challenges of formation of perceptions and views of citizens about the EU membership, about how much subjective assessments affect their views about the relation of harms and benefits resulting from the membership, and finally how Croatian citizens assess the quality of life, life satisfaction and feeling of happiness as compared with citizens of other European countries. Aleksandar Štulhofer investigates the views of citizens concerning their mistrust of and resistance against the European Union membership, and based on the results obtained, gives a concrete list of policy proposals or recommendations as to how to reduce euroscepticism. Dragan Bagić and Ante Šalinović test empirically the extent to which the

views of citizens about European integration depend on weighing of relations between costs and benefits with respect to themselves personally and how much on an assessment towards the country as a whole. The results entail a very interesting observation that the views are formed at a relatively superficial level and that they are rather subject to political and historical than to economic and personal reasons. Croatian citizens evaluate the level of subjective welfare and feelings of happiness relatively high, as reported by Ljiljana Kaliterna Lipovčan and Zvezdana Prizmić Larsen. In order to retain this assessment and feeling about the present time, or even increase the level of satisfaction in the future, they should rather reconsider their membership in the European integration based on utilitarian expectations in relation to general, historical and political impressions.

Third group of authors, comprising Ana-Maria Boromisa and Višnja Šamardžija, Ivana Jović and Marina Kesner Škreb, Dubravko Mihaljek, Ivana Vlašić and Mirna Vlašić Feketija as well as Davor Vidas, start off from the general Lisbon objectives which are further discussed in accordance with single topic areas such as the health care, state aid and environmental protection.

Authors Ana-Maria Boromisa and Višnja Šamardžija refer critically to the spectrum of Lisbon objectives as well as the extent to which Croatia has been successfully in approaching them. A rather detailed insight into how Croatia really harmonised its state aid with the European standards and expectations is given in a very precise analysis by Ivana Jović and Marina Kesner Škreb. The differences are great, and Croatia has a difficult journey ahead till they are finally adjusted. The same can be said about the health sector, which is not among the sectors in which the EU directly requires reforms as a membership condition, but it nevertheless requires urgent reform because of its internal inefficiency and due to an expenditure of public money. Dubravko Mihaljek puts forward arguments why reform in this sector is necessary, which – for an area that is poorly covered by statistics and analytically studied – represented a real research challenge, the results of which the reader can genuinely enjoy. Ivana Vlašić and Mirna Vlašić Feketija dealt with the area of environmental preservation research, pointing out the serious deficit in preparation of documentation for the implementation of protection as well as in the education and skills of the civil service in being capable of applying for and making use of the pre-accession funds. At the moment constraints in administrative capacities seem to be greater challenge than the problem of paucity of financial resources.

Davor Vidas discusses the protection of particularly sensitive European sea areas, putting forward arguments as to why it would be useful to have the Adriatic Sea proclaimed a particularly sensitive sea area and how this could be achieved.

In closing it can be stated that the process of joining the EU is exceptionally important in both political and social sense, which is why there is such a large number of individual research efforts related to this topic, yet interdisciplinary structured researches are rather very uncommon. Hence the particular value of this book is in its successful assembly of researchers around the common current topic who, from different angles of their scientific areas and/or disciplines, thus interdisciplinary, address the analysis of process of Croatian accession to the European Union. The volume brings together economists, sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, political scientists and ecologists, with their work experiences in institutes, faculties, public administration, NGOs, international organisations and foreign

and domestic banks. Although the book contains extremely valuable original scientific contributions, due to the interdisciplinary approach mentioned and its clear, appropriate and “readable” style, it is nevertheless interesting and fascinating to a wider circle of readers. The mere fact that the Institute of Public Finance has prepared its fourth edition in a row demonstrates by itself how valuable this topic on association with and final accession to the European Union is for researchers as well as for the whole community. The topic of integration is not going to be exhausted with just formal integration and with its obligations of membership being adopted, although the area of interest will logically be transferred from issues like what and how to reform to an assessment of the effects of reforms and the level of competitiveness achieved. It is to be hoped that organisers and financers of this project will find the strength and willingness to provide, in this extremely interesting social process of exceptional implications for the economy and quality of life of the citizens, another volume or so of such valuable research contributions.

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