

The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union

edited by John O' Brennan

Routledge Advances in European Politics, 2006, pp. 206

Albania and the European Union:

The tumultuous journey towards integration and accession

edited by Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin

I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007, pp. 208

reviewed by Esmeralda Gassie*

John O'Brennan's book on Eastern enlargement, published last spring, is of great interest to analysts of the south-eastern European countries' enlargement process. It covers the institutional, together with the historical and political aspects of the fifth European enlargement. The ambitious piece of work goes in depth into what O'Brennan calls the 'complex and ever changing phenomenon'. The attempt is successful in mirroring the interaction between various participants in the process, showing their respective functions and the consequences of their actions, which for a work published so shortly after the CEE countries' accession, is impressive. The first chapters detail the sequential development of the enlargement from the collapse of Berlin wall euphoria to the troubles of implementing the *acquis communautaire*, so important for newly democratic states. Even though determinism is avoided through the insistence on the influence of the enlargement project amongst the members of the European Union itself, reference is made, throughout the book, to the irrevocability of the process. It seems to be just a matter of time, for Eastern European countries, to adapt their political regimes, their economic and administrative structures. And O'Brennan is, without any doubt, a partisan of enlargement.

The inimitable style of the book allows the neophyte to understand the high stakes involved in each actor's role, without falling into simplification. It sets the standards for the area of EU enlargement analysis. Students of the next wave of EU enlargement will have to cover not only the importance of the EU Presidency, the Council or

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the Commission, but also the civil society, the political elites in the member countries to be, and the current ones, as an interactive dialogue. The challenge for the fifth enlargement involved the dimensions the whole process took (ten countries) and the 'painful' adaptation steps every actor had to go through. This will not be the case for the south-eastern European enlargement, as the lesson has now been learned through large scale, 'traumatic' processes. But the debate still has to be held on the forms the application of the criteria will take in the case of the SEE countries. The reason is the recent conflict-driven history of the region, which might threaten the consolidation of the integration. And we must not forget that even if the region has smaller dimensions, the scale of the economic and political gap is still wide.

O'Brennan's book perfectly shows the identity searching process of the EU project. Its positive outcome cannot be taken for granted. After searching for the image to project, the instruments to be used for an effective process, it might be time for a debate on the most appropriate criteria for measuring a successful implementation of democratic regimes, market economies and good governance in public administration. The historical foundations of the European Union project and their parallels with the current changes in all EU member countries and their neighbours, have to be made clearer. The longer this debate is delayed, the more difficult it will become to justify the project. This appears clearly in the work of M. Bogdani and J. Loughlin. The authors certainly portray the changes in many areas of the Albanian political and socio-economic processes (pages 36 to 86 and pages 209 to 218), as a result of the EU integration process. But their book fails to conduct a structural analysis of the role the EU institutions, together with the Albanian ones, have played in this process. More particularly, the book only describes the efforts made in fighting corruption (page 148 to 160), consolidating public policy making (pages 163 to 166), the role of the political elite (pages 170 to 194), etc. Structural analysis of the influence that the so called 'enlargement fatigue' and the corollary tightening of the criteria to be fulfilled in addition to the constant postponing of the proper integration date, would have partly explained the disarray of the domestic elite, so important in the authors' opinion (p.192). The day to day implementation of the *acquis* becomes difficult, with on the one hand increasing pressures from the EU to downsize the public sector, endless transformation of the electoral code, decentralisation of the government - all of which weaken the effect of governmental structures - while on the other hand being able to fight corruption at various levels of the public administration, to restructure the tax collection system, the health and education infrastructures as well as to emulate strategic national policy-making in the long term, all require a substantial role to be played by strong, omnipresent public institutions. This dilemma facing Albanian policy makers is not apparent in the book, even though there is a long list of domestic and regional factors.

Finally, both books show the complex process of EU integration and the institutional, political and socio-economic transformations it involves. The systemic aspect of this process has to be emphasized, notably by a deeper analysis of its bilateral, interactive character.