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BOOK REVIEW

## Enlarging Germany and the EU

**How Germany unified and the EU enlarged : negotiating the accession through transplantation and adaptation,** Tereza Novotna, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, xxi, 235 p. (New perspectives in German political studies), ISBN 978-1-137-47760-6; 978-1-137-47761-3 (ebk); 978-1-137-47762-0 (ePub)

Two of the major geopolitical changes of the past quarter century were the 1990 unification of Germany and the 2004 Big Bang enlargement bringing ten Central European countries into the EU. Tereza Novotna examines the inter-relationship between these two epoch-making events, pointing to the different methods of accession – transplantation and adaptation. She considers the different trajectories of these two very different models, the balance of power in the negotiations, the personalities involved and the views of elites and ordinary citizens.

With the sudden collapse of the Berlin Wall, there was no time for a lengthy process of adaptation. East Germans were voting with their feet and Chancellor Kohl's government was constantly behind the curve with their plans for a gradual unification. This reviewer, who was based in East Berlin as a diplomat before the Wall came down, recalls attending meetings of Western officials as late as spring 1989 when nobody thought the regime was about to collapse. In addition, there was no West German masterplan on how to deal with such a scenario. In the end, political realities led to the transplantation model and the momentous decision to offer a one to one exchange rate of the *Ostmark* with the *Deutschmark*, a move that made no economic sense, but which stemmed the massive westward population drift. The author touches, perhaps too lightly, on the financial and economic implications of this and related decisions. The late Helmut Schmidt, for example, was strongly critical of Kohl's refusal to raise taxes to finance unification. The author might also have explored the link between the decision to borrow more and Germany's negotiating position on the establishment of the Maastricht criteria for the euro.

East Germany did not just join West Germany, it also joined the EU, which was a remarkable achievement in the timeframe of less than a year. The method of doing so was again transplantation, that is taking over the *acquis*, lock stock and barrel, just as it had to do in accepting West German political, legal, administrative, financial, economic and social customs. For some, a more accurate description was a 'West German takeover.' Anyone who was in a leading position in society, from head teachers to army and police chiefs, was dismissed while others had to undergo thorough ideological checks. The transplantation was difficult for many, especially those over fifty who had little chance of retraining in the business practices of the West.

For the states of Central and Eastern Europe, there was a very different approach in their quest to 'return to Europe'. Essentially, they had a decade to prepare, to adapt and to negotiate transition periods. As Novotna points out, negotiations is a misnomer for the accession process. All applicant states can do is extract transitional periods from the EU, but they cannot change the *acquis*. It was also a vastly more complicated process with simultaneous negotiations for ten acceding states.

Thanks to numerous interviews with key players, the author is able to provide an excellent analysis of the enlargement process from different perspectives, especially the European Commission, successive presidencies and the officials negotiating membership on behalf of the candidate countries. She identifies the leading role played by the Commission services and correctly notes that many of the disagreements during the negotiations were between member

states. A chapter on the Czech negotiations offers a plethora of interesting details with due attention paid to Jan Telcika's role as chief negotiator. Novotna notes that he played this role to perfection. One of his tools was a computer programme set up to check what deals were being offered to other candidates. Among the more contentious issues were free movement of labour and the timeframe to reach EU environmental standards. The Czech accession negotiations also had to deal with some sensitive issues such as the Temlin nuclear reactor near the border with Austria and the infamous Benes Decrees that led to the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia after 1945.

Novotna makes clear that the ultimate prize of EU membership was the major carrot driving reforms. This is an important lesson for the EU's relations with countries within the European Neighbourhood Policy. If there is no membership carrot on offer, then it is a much more difficult task to drive reforms. The latest EU policy revision of the Eastern Partnership with the emphasis on differentiation and more for more seems to understand this limitation.

Novotna concludes that the speed and method of accession can have a lasting impact on how citizens view their new political structures. The speed of transplantation can lead to resentment and an 'us versus them' mentality. The adaptation model offers a greater opportunity for a shared identity in the common enterprise. But it seems that neither model, transplantation nor adaptation, can guarantee popular satisfaction. Despite massive financial transfers, there has been widespread resentment in East Germany at the West German takeover leading to a certain *Ostalgia*. In the Czech Republic, euro-scepticism remains high, partly fuelled by the dominant figure of Vaclav Klaus. In the EU, there is still talk of 'new member states' more than a decade after accession. What Novotna failed to pick up in her interviews was the lack of knowledge on the part of EU officials about life under communism and the difficulties faced by citizens and their leaders in trying to extricate themselves from several decades of authoritarian rule. To almost all East Europeans, the salaries of EU officials were quite unbelievable. The fact that a head of unit in the Commission earned more than the Polish Prime Minister raised many eyebrows.

Novotna's research findings will be useful as the EU contemplates further enlargement to the Western Balkans and Turkey. She suggests that Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU before they were ready, a view widely shared in Brussels. This led the EU to take a tougher stance on the accession negotiations for Croatia to join the EU and will certainly be repeated in future. There may be a pause as the EU suffers from enlargement fatigue, but whenever the accession process gets underway again this book will be essential reading for practitioners on all sides.

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