

*BOOK REVIEW*

**Iordan Gheorghe BĂRBULESCU, Oana Andreea ION and Nicolae TODERAȘ. 2013. "Coordonarea afacerilor europene la nivel național. Mecanisme de colaborare între Guvern și Parlament în domeniul afacerilor europene. Studiu comparativ în statele membre UE (Coordination of European Affairs at National Level. Mechanisms of Cooperation between the Government and the Parliament in European Affairs. Comparative Study in the EU Member States). Strategy and Policy Studies – SPOS (Study no. 2). Bucharest: IER – The European Institute of Romania.**

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The study entitled *Coordination of European affairs at national level. Mechanisms of cooperation between the Government and the Parliament in European affairs. Comparative study in the EU member states*, was elaborated by Prof. Dr. Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Univ. Lect. Dr. Oana-Andreea Ion and Univ. Lect. Dr. Nicoae Toderaș, researchers / illustrious teachers initiated in the field of European affairs at the request of the European Institute of Romania. The research aims to analyze the way how Romania has developed its own system of coordination of European affairs, as well as to verify its effectiveness, while providing recommendations concerning its improvement.

This paper seeks to clarify why the management of European affairs in Romania does not give proof of coherence and efficiency, practiced in other older or newer EU Member States, particularly with regard to the absorption of structural and cohesion funds. Demonstrating a high degree of objectivity and professionalism, the authors of this study leave entirely to the readers and policy makers (representatives of the Government and Parliament) to determine after reading the

paper if it succeeded to give a pertinent answer to the set questions and if the proposals for the improvement of the activities in this field are worth to be taken into consideration by the Romanian authorities.

If we look at the structure of this paper it is divided into several sections. In the introduction we find the theoretical framing (approach), the assumed objectives and a thorough description of the research methodology, at the same time also being discussed the necessity of this study in the current politico-institutional context.

The main objective of the empirical research is to examine the institutional framework of the European affairs in our country in order to improve and maximize its efficiency. The developers of this study in addition to the general objective have also identified some specific objectives, namely:

- presentation from a comparative perspective of the best practices in the management of European affairs and cooperation mechanisms in the EU Member States;
- disclosure of the Romanian practice in this matter to the reader and identifying the causal consecution, generator of inefficient links between the main domestic policymakers participating in the management process of European affairs, a special attention being paid to the presentation of the collaboration between the executive (Government) and legislative (Parliament);
- formulation of suggestions (recommendations) regarding the reconfiguration of the existing institutional architecture of coordination of European affairs at national level.

In the introductory part of the paper is emphasized the theoretical approach (framing), through which the developers of this study assume a vision stating that the European policies are distinct from foreign affairs, forming part of a complex governance process specific to the *European colossus*. In the elaboration of this paper the authors have used theoretical approaches specific to political science and public policy, the entire research being focused on developing the institutional arrangements and organizational framework for the management of European affairs at internal level and the evaluation their effectiveness. In this analysis, the Parliament, the Government and the institution of the President are seen by the three authors as interdependent actors in all the coordination process of European affairs. Through interdependence is understood a high degree of communication and transparency, accountability, responsibility, organizational responsiveness, and organizational efficiency.

The authors state that both distinguishing the causes of inefficiency of the institutional arrangements of the management of European affairs in Romania, and

the development of the final recommendations to the authorities on reshaping the institutional design have been realized through the prism of *new institutionalism*, however without giving a clear definition of this approach. In our opinion it was important to initiate the reader in the background of this theory and maybe a description of what the *old institutionalism* means and institutionalism in general, in order to have a clearer view on the topic of discussion. Guy Peters affirms that new institutionalism focuses on the multiplicity and complexity of objectives, arguing that the most rational choice assumptions tend to separate political life from its cultural and socio-economic roots. Thus political life becomes a compilation of autonomous choices by the relevant political actors. (Peters, 2005, 9). According to this theory institutions matter in a predictable way in shaping both the political process, and policy outcome (Pollack, 2005, 22).

Within the research methodology the comparative analysis was used, presenting the models of European affairs management from the Member States, comparing them with that existing in Romania, and a qualitative analysis. In the qualitative dimension of the research the team produced a series of interviews with key decision makers from the authorities / structures involved in European affairs. It is emphasized the lack of using of the quantitative method of analysis, given that the *supplied empirical data wouldn't have shown with the same profundity the causal consecution generating inefficient reports between the actors involved in the coordination of European affairs at internal level and it wouldn't have permitted equally the revealing of the main trends shaping the options for improving the status quo.*

In the second chapter of the research are provided some information about the legislative and institutional changes in the EU after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, since the reforms initiated by this *new European constitution* have a direct impact on the management design of the European affairs in the Member States. Here the authors accentuate the increased role of national parliaments provided by the Lisbon Treaty in the EU policy making process, which according to the scholars should give a new impetus to adapt the domestic institutional design to the new European institutional arrangements. Under the new Treaty national parliaments are directly involved in the decision-making procedure, the European Commission being required to submit any legislative proposal to the national parliaments must, which must ensure that the proposal complies with the principle of subsidiarity (Lisbon Treaty, the Protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality, Article 6, 152).

The third part of the paper is a comparative analysis of the institutional design for the coordination of European affairs in the Member States. In this chapter the authors present the models of coordination of European affairs in all the 27 EU member states, categorizing them into three groups of countries. In the first group

of countries whose model of management has been put under scrutiny can be found France, Germany, UK, Spain and Poland. Several factors have played an important role in choosing these models, such as country size or the experience they have in the management of European affairs, countries belonging to different waves of enlargement. It was also taken into account the fact that these countries have different perceptions about how the European Union should develop, some of these countries advocate for a federalist approach, while others are followers of intergovernmentalism. Each of the models presented teaches us something like:

In case of *l'hexagon (France)*, which for the coordination of European issues founded in 2005 the "Inter-ministerial Committee for Europe" (composed of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, official with the rank of Minister responsible for European Affairs, Minister of Economy and Finance, and other ministers in depending on the agenda of the meetings) is worth mentioning the placing of the Secretariat General for European Affairs under the direct authority of the prime minister, and the structure of the Secretariat General (detached experts from line ministries). In the authors' opinion the setup of SGAE of detached experts from all ministries leads to resolving the inter-ministerial issues directly within the SGAE, of a particular importance being considered the existence of a permanent communication between SGAE and the Permanent Representation of France to the EU;

Looking at the example provided by **Germany** we find out that in its case we cannot speak about a single authority at national level, the German system of coordination of European affairs being a decentralized one, and from all the federal ministries, the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Minister of Economy and Technology detain the main role in coordinating the activities of the other ministries concerning European issues, the members of these ministries also chairing various formations which have the duty to coordinate the opinions of other ministries in European issues;

The system from **Great Britain** in comparison with that from Germany is a centralised one, but very efficient. According to the authors it is worth mentioning the *Code of Practice on consultation procedure* that establishes a set of common standards and *the European Civil Service Fast Stream*, a training program dedicated to continuous preparation in European affairs, but also for a career in the EU institutions;

In the **Kingdom of Spain** the management of European affairs is done at two levels, at external and internal level. Externally this function is fulfilled by the Permanent Representative of Spain to the EU and at national level by the government. Spain is a good example to the success in attracting and absorbing

European funds and to define an important role of the country in the European institutions. Absorption capacity is the degree to which a country is able to effectively and efficiently spend the financial resources allocated from the Structural Funds and is determined by three factors, namely: the macroeconomic ability of absorption, financial and administrative capacity of absorption (Oprescu et al. 9-10).

In case of **Poland**, a country with a Communist legacy (like Romania) we ascertain that the management of European affairs is undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Department of the Committee for European Affairs, which is responsible for "*coordinating the implementation of the European policy of Poland in the activity of EU institutions, primarily in the European Council, the Council of the European Union and other subsidiary bodies.*" The Polish example teaches us that the Romanian central authorities should already start preparing for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, function which will be held by our country in the second half of 2019.

The authors of the volume in addition to presenting the models of coordination of EU affairs in the countries mentioned above have identified a second group of states represented by Denmark and Lithuania, however their description is not as thorough as that of the other five countries. The writers reveal that in Denmark, the European affairs are coordinated by the Committee for Foreign Affairs, this body ensuring the permanent representation of Denmark in the EU institutions, and also the participation in the Coreper. At the same time the attention is drawn on the control and the intense involvement which the Danish Parliament has in the management of European affairs, which differentiates this country from the majority of the other members of the European Union, thus shaping a system where the Parliament has a decisive role. The small Baltic country, Lithuania is a good example just like Spain in attracting the structural funds, in the period 2007-2013 having the highest rate of absorption of European funds among the states from the last enlargement wave.

In the last group of countries presented enter the rest of the Member States, besides our country, Romania, a separate chapter being designed for revealing the Romanian practice in coordination of European affairs and identification of the causal chain generating inefficient links between the major domestic policymakers participants in the management of European affairs, especially focusing on the collaboration between the Government and the Parliament, respectively the Government and the Presidential Administration.

To each state put under scrutiny was applied the same analysis grid, structured on three institutional-systemic pillars:

- constitutional arrangements (regulatory) in coordinating EU affairs: the organization of the state, relation between Government-Parliament, the powers of parliament and government, the role of the President or of the Royal House;
- normative variables of the inter-institutional arrangements: effectiveness and efficiency of the arrangements, clear distribution of competences, promptness of interventions, facilitation of the participatory and consultative framework with the stakeholders, results and impact visibility
- institutional-systemic resistance variables: alteration of arrangements in the context of historical evolution and deepening of European integration, causes of inter-institutional conflicts, identified methods of conflict resolution and of solving inter-institutional tensions, sustainability of the identified solutions.

The role of this analysis consists in taking good examples from these countries and their implementation in the system of management of European affairs in Romania, thus streamlining the current institutional arrangements for coordination of European issues.

The fourth chapter is devoted to assessing the national system, namely the institutional design of coordination of European affairs in Romania. Firstly the readers get acquainted with a historical presentation of the Romanian model of management of EU affairs, being presented the key moments and the main phenomena and processes related to the strengthening of the Romanian model. In the second part of the chapter are unfolded and evaluated the existing systems up to today, the analysis including both coordination arrangements within the Government and those between the Government and Parliament. Likewise among the lines of this chapter is deciphered the causal consecution that creates and preserves the inefficient institutional arrangements in the coordination of European affairs at internal level. Much of the blame can be attributed to the inter-institutional conflict and to the unclear specification of responsibilities, the tension between the state institutions clearly affecting the institutional communication.

It is enough if it's taken the example of the Presidential Administration versus Government, the first attempting to subordinate the government, sometimes leaving to it only the implementation of its decisions and removing it from the role of conceiving and implementing ex-ante of the positions of Romania. In the last part of the chapter are listed the main risks of the institutional formats of coordination of European affairs which existed in Romania, here being used and capitalized the interviews realized by the research team with the key decision makers within the main authorities and structures involved in European affairs.

At the end of the study are described the strengths and weaknesses of the national institutions with powers in European affairs and are drawn the conclusions, finally the authors coming up with recommendations for improving the management system of European Affairs of Romania, hoping that this package of proposals will be considered and implemented by the related authorities. The authors of this empirical research strongly assert that not the design format of the coordination system of EU affairs makes the difference but the functionality, consistency and perseverance of the elected ones. The scholars have concluded that in our country there is no model of management of European affairs, and we can only talk about a permanent process of setting up / reestablishment / modification of copied or inappropriate institutional structures.

The study shows that despite the 6 years spent within the Union as a Member State with full rights, and the 20 years since the signing of the European Association Agreement, in our country the national institutional framework for the management of European affairs is completely ineffective.

Thus the authors come up with recommendations that require:

- rethinking the institutional design of coordination of European affairs leading to a single national coordination;
- establishing / restoring of a 'politically correct' relation between the executive and the legislative regarding European affairs so that Parliament, the ultimate expression of democracy, to have an active role;
- adopting in emergency the post-accession strategy covering at least the period 2014 - 2020;
- ensuring the stability and sustainability of a national system of coordination of European affairs to enable a long-term approach;
- introduction of mandatory ex-ante, intermediate and ex-post evaluation related to the whole activity concerning European policies and funding;
- development of a national program of ongoing training of qualified personnel in European affairs and their remuneration according to their effort and quality of work;
- creation and development of a more flexible electronic communication system with less restricted access than the current system and the elaboration and implementation of a national consultation strategy regarding Romania's participation in the administration of EU policies;
- unblocking the absorption of structural and cohesion funds by providing a real co-financing of projects, and by simplifying the system by abandoning the multiple and unclear coordination. Unfortunately in our country the absorption of European funds was and remains problematic and poor, it is

enough if we look at the latest figures provided by KPMG, showing that Romania was ranked last in the European Union concerning the absorption of EU funds. Specialists from KPMG believe that our country *has a unique opportunity to get out of this loose and vicious circle, but it is absolutely necessary to mobilize all resources capable and specialized with decision making power at governmental, inter-ministerial level, and at the level of the political and social business environment, to align national interest and coagulation of a coherent and integrated vision, to lay out strategically and realistic, based on competitiveness and growth criteria, the national and trans-sectoral priorities of the next period.* (National News Agency, Romania, last in the EU on EU funds absorption at the end of last year, 2013).

Regarding these suggestions we also believe that the legislative, namely the Parliament should play a more important role in the coordination of European affairs, especially after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, which provides an opportunity to rethink the role of the Romanian Parliament, which should stand out of its self-imposed marginalization and numb stagnation. It is absolutely necessary a uniform and clear settlement, providing a genuine mechanism for collaboration between the executive and legislative, efficient from a financial perspective, flexible, but in the same time conducive to allow the systematic participation of the legislative power in the whole issue related to the European decision-making process and the control of the government activity in the European institutions.

We believe that the specification and clear separation of institutional prerogatives, mutual respect of areas of expertise, collaboration between institutions and the assuming by Parliament of a role in the management of EU affairs to the extent of its legitimacy, are the key to have an efficient system of coordination of European affairs (Ghinea et al., 34).

After reading the study we consider that it has made an exhaustive analysis of the subject in question and it proposes viable recommendations to policy makers, but in the current phase of research it cannot be predicted whether or not these recommendations will be implemented by the competent authorities, which remains a mystery the future.

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