

## BOOK REVIEW

**Miruna Troncotă. 2014. *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critical Case Study of Europeanization*, Bucharest, Tritonic Publishing House, 327 pages, ISBN: 978-606-8571-36-2.**

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Initially coined for describing a particular way of policy-making inside the European Union, the term 'Europeanization' was progressively broadened. Nowadays, the concept encompasses many other dimensions of the EU's peculiarities, including the transformative power of the EU exercised over those societies eager to join it. The conditionality employed by the EU in the accession of the candidate states in the enlargement process was rationally designed to ensure the compatibility of the potential future member states with the Union as a whole. Miruna Troncotă's book is the result of a research made in order to put the Europeanization process to the most stressful test: the EU's results in the effort of deeply changing Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and transforming it into a peaceful, democratic, EU-compatible society.

After discussing the term, Troncotă offers an understanding of Europeanization in a manner consistent with the meanings provided by Radaelli, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier. In order to observe it, she considers that two different narratives can justify the choice of BiH as a good case-study for this process - first, the "failure" of the process in this country, and second, its "exceptionality". Inspired by the work of Vivien Schmidt, Troncotă opts for the theoretical framework offered by discursive institutionalism (DI), through which she intends to approach these two perspectives. She declares that the motivation of this option is "to argue for a middle grounded type of definition of Europeanization placed on the epistemological continuum between rationalist and interpretivist/constructivist perspectives." (p. 52).

The possibility of such a continuum is a matter of academic debate in the realm of Social Sciences. Despite her intention, it looks that Troncotă has, as many other researchers, inclined more to one position than to the other, in

her case toward the interpretivist/constructivist perspective, as long as she defines the EU conditionality as “a discursive construct” (p. 53). The above-mentioned epistemological intention is reiterated when she discusses the theoretical lenses. DI “is placed in between rational choice theorists and postmodernist constructivists, going beyond the boundaries of methodological individualism and instrumental rationality” (p. 67). Even so, DI “regards discourse as a link between actors and institutions” (p. 62), based on the “assumption [...] that policy-makers and stakeholders (as actors of Europeanization) construct Europe through language, discourse and every day institutional practices” (p. 67). Troncotă’s preference for constructivism in the epistemological balance is visible in the definition of Europeanization (as a “symbolic framework” – p. 70, or as “a transfer of meanings” – p. 71). She finally clarifies the stance in the conclusions of the book: “[b]ased on socio-constructivist theoretical lenses, the theoretical purpose of this study was to analyse the various ways in which the multitude of actors got engaged in the meaning making process of Europeanization in BiH” (p. 273), regarded as “a discursive arena where policies are shaped by complex discursive and institutional interactions” (p. 275).

Methodologically, Troncotă built her research on a quite complex design. In order to investigate the perceived failure of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Europeanization, she discusses the complicated political architecture put in place after the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995) that followed the inter-ethnic war. In BiH there are “four layers of governance [...], 13 parliaments and governments [...] with over 180 ministers and 760 members of legislative bodies. The country has three official languages for the three constituent peoples and two alphabets.” (p. 143). In this institutional context, the analysis of the narratives used by the stakeholders allows Troncotă to divide the EU conditionality in BiH in three stages – the construction (from 2003 to 2005), the diffusion (2006-2008), and the delayed institutionalization (2009-2011) – each having its own dynamic. Troncotă considers that these two issues are interconnected: European themes cannot be discussed separately from those concerning the need for a constitutional reform.

Troncotă also conducted “an extended series of interviews” (p. 200) on the field, in Brussels and in BiH. The EU officials (in Brussels and in BiH) and the representatives of the BiH’s authorities, at various levels, “Eurocrats” and “Ethnocrats”, were thus given a voice. The analysis of the different narratives – for instance, that of “failure” and that of “war” – allows Troncotă to offer an explanation for the current status of the Europeanization process in BiH. Her

main conclusion is that the local actors used the divergent interpretations of the EU conditionality in order to maintain their positions in the present constitutional order (p.279). In accordance with the tenets of constructivism, to which, as previously shown, she seems to adhere, Troncotă completes this agent-based explanation with a structural one, each of them clarifying the other: "The most contentious issue in the process [of Europeanization] was fragmentation of authorities (at both parties BiH and EU) and there was a lack of coordination between the various levels of governance" (pp. 283-284).

Miruna Troncotă's *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critical Case Study of Europeanization* offers good reasons for optimism regarding the fate of the European Studies, in general, and their future in Romania, in particular. Troncotă provides here not only a coherent insight in the recent directions of the field, but she also gives a proof of intellectual courage. There are at least three reasons for this observation. Firstly, she uses a new, still in the making, theoretical framework, and tries to contribute to its development; secondly, she had the ambition to approach a difficult case to discuss - and studying a "failure" is a challenge for any scholar; and thirdly (a very rare situation for Romanian scholars...), she had the courage of conducting the research on the field, on delicate political themes, in a country where the inter-ethnic war, by its consequences and interpretations, is still present in the mind of any member of the society. *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critical Case Study of Europeanization* represents not only a remarkable contribution in the Romanian landscape of European Studies, but also a very useful tool for those interested in a better understanding of the present state of affairs in BiH. As for the author, Miruna Troncotă made a promise regarding her future research, which is to be waited with interest.