

## Book Review

Mario Munta  
**EU Socio-Economic  
 Governance in Central  
 and Eastern Europe:  
 The European Semester and  
 National Employment Policies**

Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2021,  
 261 pp.

As the literature on the systemic effects of European policies on the Croatian policy context is scarce, the appearance of any such book is a commendable event. The book *EU Socio-Economic Governance in Central and Eastern Europe: The European Semester and National Employment Policies* by Mario Munta, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, deals not only with the effects of European policies on the Croatian context, but also with specific transformations of the policy context caused by Europeanization in three other post-communist countries – Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia. This comparative dimension is where the book's added value lies. Published by Routledge, the book, consisting of eight chapters, offers a systematic comparative overview of the impact of the European Semester on national employment policies.

The first chapter (“Employment policy and the European Semester: An introduction”) has two parts. The first part discusses the general impact of the European Se-

mester on policy changes in the Member States, and initially identifies its impact on a specific area of employment. The author first points out what kind of policy modes the concept of the European Semester belongs to, classifying it as economic governance based on policy coordination and policy learning. Such a system of economic governance is based predominantly on the concept of *soft law* and not on the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, regardless of whether it is a form of positive or negative integration. At the outset of the chapter the author shows that research on the impact of various forms of EU economic governance on public policy-making in a group of former socialist countries has been relatively scarce – particularly the comparative studies of the impact of soft law policies on the public policies in former socialist EU member countries. The research presented will hopefully fill this gap by trying to show in a comparative way the impact of the European Semester on the employment policies in the above-mentioned countries. In such a highly innovative delimitation of the topic of his research, the author asks three basic questions and tries to answer them with his own research: 1) To what extent did the European Semester affect the changes in the employment policy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the period from 2011 to 2018?; 2) In what way, i.e. through which mechanisms, is the European Semester influencing the changes mentioned?; 3) Under what conditions did the Semester manage or fail to exert this influence? While the first part of the first chapter describes the theoretical and methodological framework of the author's research, the second part outlines the key features in the development of employment policy

before and after the great economic crisis of 2008. This part also describes the basic timetable elements of the European Semester, the deadlines within which it takes place, the actors involved and the general direction of its development.

In the second chapter (“Theorizing the influence of the European Semester: Mechanisms, conditions and policy change”), the author discusses the theoretical concepts of the impact of the European Semester, examining the mechanisms of the influence and the conditions under which this influence is manifested as the forms of public policy changes that occur on that basis. After a detailed review of the literature on this impact, the author underlines the importance of an approach based on the new intergovernmentalism, as the one that seems most suitable for examining the impact of the European Semester on national policies of Member States. In this part of the book, his considerations of the form of change in public policies and the mechanisms of influence that the Semester has at its disposal are particularly important. The author distinguishes between procedural and substantive forms of the policy change and provides examples for each of these forms. He then examines the mechanisms by which the Semester influences Member States’ public policies, distinguishing between the mechanisms based on external pressures, mutual learning and creative appropriation.

The third chapter (“Croatia: Cherry-picking from the European Semester”) is dedicated to the impact of the European Semester on employment policy in Croatia. Based on sixteen interviews with persons who participated in the formulation of the public policy guidelines related to the European Semester, the author shows that there have been minor changes in the

ability of Croatian representatives to present their views and policy views to the European Commission representatives. The social partners – trade unions in particular – are dissatisfied with the level of inclusion offered to them by the government when it comes to the consultation process on fundamental public policy proposals. This equally applies to short deadlines within which they have to respond to the government’s views and to the fact that their proposals are usually not considered. On the other hand, the proposals related to introducing stricter penalties for early retirement and rewarding longer stays in the world of work did not meet with the approval of citizens and unions, so the Semester’s influence on this part of labour market policy was absent. The positive effect of the Semester was therefore mainly reduced to better organization of inter-ministerial consultation mechanisms and better government policy planning.

A study conducted in Hungary (fourth chapter, “Hungary: A case of neglect?”) showed that the impact of the European Semester was relatively limited in that country as well. The Hungarian government, guided by the authoritarian concept of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s rule, largely rejected the European Commission’s recommendations and insisted on maintaining measures such as public works policy, which the Commission regularly criticized and sought to limit. It was not until 2016, after five years of pressure from the European Commission, that the Hungarian government agreed to reduce this type of measures and introduce, to a greater extent, other types of active labour market policy, related to training programs.

The impact of the European Semester on employment policy in Slovakia is

presented in the fifth chapter (“Slovakia: Reinforcing existing trajectories”). Although the effects of the Semester on public policies in that country can be assessed as somewhat more favourable than in the case of Croatia and Hungary, largely due to better fiscal consolidation, these effects have not been the same in all areas. The active employment policy expenditures are largely focused on employment subsidies, and hardly ever on employability improvement programs (such as training and development programs), in which a very small percentage of the population has participated. The author shows that in Slovakia, actors in the political arena used the mechanisms of the European Semester as a means to strengthen existing policies and reform goals. However, under pressure from the European Commission, the Long-Term Unemployment Action Plan was eventually adopted, and the interviews conducted in that country show that the pressure from the European level in this regard has been very useful and effective.

The sixth chapter (“Slovenia: Crisis pressure, socialization and strategic use of the European Semester”) addresses the impact of the Semester on employment policy in Slovenia. Based on interviews with Slovenian participants in the European Semester cycle, the author concludes that its mechanisms have had a beneficial effect on the use of a more systematic analysis of employment policy-making in Slovenia and the spread of evidence-based policy-making instruments. This was primarily reflected in a more systematic involvement of the social partners in the drafting of strategic documents.

In the next, seventh chapter (“How does the European Semester influence employment policies in Central and Eastern Eu-

rope”), the author synthesizes the results of a comparative analysis conducted in the four countries and seeks to relate them to the theoretical concepts developed at the beginning of the book. It first looks into the importance of external pressures, mutual learning and creative appropriation, and assesses the extent to which the observed EU Member States have agreed with or opposed the European Commission’s recommendations. Pressures from the European Commission were felt in all four countries, but their content ranged from relatively controversial issues of (excessively) high redistribution in the pension system and general labour market reforms in Slovenia, to mainly technical and organizational provisions for monitoring unemployed youth in Croatia, to efforts to increase the administrative capacity of the public employment service in Slovakia. The comparative analysis undertaken by the author shows that the extent and effects of changes in employment policies depend largely on the assessment of domestic politicians and other stakeholders how much it will really cost them financially, especially given the inflow of European funds, but also on how these changes affect their political rating.

In the final, eighth chapter (“Conclusion”), the author provides the conclusion of his research. First, he presents a summary of the main findings, which included 51 actors involved in the employment policy decision-making in Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. This is followed by key empirical conclusions based on a systematic study of the effects of the Semester on employment policies, examined by a qualitative methodology. It then provides an overview of contributions to the existing literature on the European economic policy coordination and their impact on national

employment policies. In the final part of the chapter, he discusses the possibilities for increasing the effectiveness of the coordination of European employment policies.

*EU Socio-Economic Governance in Central and Eastern Europe: The European Semester and National Employment Policies* is an important publication and a great contribution to the EU policy-making academic field. The research was conducted in four European countries and is one of the first studies showing comparatively the impact of the soft-law-based EU coordinating policies on domestic public policies in the former socialist countries, now members of the European Union. Starting from a theoretical approach based on the new intergovernmentalism followed by a systematically applied qualitative research methodology, Munta offers a valuable and pioneering study when it comes to the Europeanization of public policies. Evidence of it can be seen in the fact that it was published in the *Routledge Studies on Government and the European Union* series, edited by Professor Andy Smith (University of Bordeaux, France), a distinguished researcher of the European policy-making process. The publication of this book will certainly be a great impetus for research into European policies in political science and other social sciences in Croatia and abroad. Thus, with his first book, Mario Munta established himself as an internationally relevant researcher. While we can look forward to seeing more similar research from Munta in the future, this book is highly recommended to all who are interested in the field of Europeanization of public policies.

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Book Review

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Goran Musić  
**Making and Breaking  
the Yugoslav Working Class.  
The Story of Two Self-Managed  
Factories**

CEU Press, Budapest, 2021, 257 pp.

The book by Goran Musić looks into self-management and the myth of nationalist working classes' responsibility for the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Brilliantly pedagogical in explaining self-management as theory and as practice, even to the freshest of beginners in economic history and theory, this book is an important puzzle piece for furthering our understanding of the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia. Standing among the works of Catherine Samary<sup>1</sup>, Susan Woodward<sup>2</sup>, Vladimir Unkovski-Korica<sup>3</sup> and Gal Kim<sup>4</sup> – to mention but a few – Musić's work brings an innovative outlook from the very factory shopfloors, bringing the subjectivity back to the work-

<sup>1</sup> Samary, Catherine (1988) *Le marché contre l'autogestion: l'expérience yougoslave*. Paris: La Brèche.

<sup>2</sup> Woodward, Susan (1995) *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia 1945-1990*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Unkovski-Korica, Vladimir (2016) *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-Alignment*. London: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>4</sup> Kim, Gal (2019) *Partisan Ruptures. Self-Management, Market Reform and the Spectre of Socialist Yugoslavia*. London: Pluto Press.