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COMPTE RENDU DE LECTURE

ARLINDO CUNHA with ALAN SWINBANK, *An Inside View of the CAP Reform Process. Explaining the MacSharry, Agenda 2000 and Fischler Reforms*

Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 256 p.

This book explains the workings of institutions and describes in detail what went on behind the scenes during the Common Agricultural Policy negotiations, focusing on the reforms that were made between 1992 and 2005. The interesting thing about the book is that it delves far beyond the technical aspects of the reforms, explaining the strategies and tactics of the various stakeholders in European negotiations. It is based on the experience of Arlindo Cunha, Portugal's former Agricultural Minister who was closely involved with the 1992 CAP reforms before becoming the Rapporteur for the 1999 and 2003 reforms. To write this book, Cunha worked closely with the British academic Alan Swinbank. Although throughout his career, the latter severely criticised the CAP, this is not apparent in the book which clearly reflects Cunha's experience and point of view, with the overall effect of giving a personal but, paradoxically, objective (or balanced, at least) perspective on the CAP and its reforms.

Although the public likely to be fascinated by the details of agricultural negotiations at the end of the 20th century is, admittedly, somewhat narrow, the book goes far beyond this, offering a unique account of the way in which European policies are drawn up from a perspective that exceeds the domain of agriculture. Furthermore, the book manages to be extremely absorbing, especially in the chapters describing negotiators' tactics. It will interest a far wider public and is set to become a political science classic on the subject of European decision-making processes.

The book's initial interest – even if it is not necessarily its main interest – is to give a historical account. The CAP was at the centre of the construction of the European Community, swallowing up colossal budgets and putting the construction itself at risk on several occasions. The authors show how, over successive periods, committed Europeans rallied to break the deadlock and “reform the CAP in order to save it” in spite of national interests, lobbying and election dates in Member States. In this respect, the book makes a major contribution to the history of the construction of Europe.

It is also a manual, giving, in the first section, an enlightening and educational explanation of institutional processes and explaining clearly the steps of decision-making. It also describes the roles of numerous stakeholders, including little-known institutions, in constructing a decision, as well as explaining the subtleties of treaties.

However, the most interesting thing about the book has to be that it analyses, through the CAP, the entire process of drawing up reforms, the manoeuvres of various countries to encourage, influence or delay it, and the coalitions, alliances and occasional betrayals. On this level, the insider information enables the reader to decipher the genesis of the agreements and it is far more than a mere manual. In several cases, the authors refer to Cunha's personal notes taken during negotiations, for example, which often prove enlightening. Some specific aspects have already been described in politicians' memoirs¹, but here, the drafting of a political decision is dissected in its entirety, making this book unique.

¹ Cf. Michel Rocard's memoirs describing negotiations on amounts for agricultural compensation: <http://www.cairn.info/revue-parlements-2006-1-page-18.htm> (accessed 20th October 2011).

I personally learned a lot. Although I had been following the reform process assiduously for 20 years, I discovered aspects of the negotiations of which I had been unaware, especially with regard to the birth of rural development policies. I was particularly impressed by the way in which certain major stakeholders from the Commission or from Member States managed to conduct complex negotiations on several levels, bringing them together with other issues and organisations (*e.g.* the GATT, the WTO, the enlargement of the Union, budget negotiations, etc.). By describing the twists and turns, the fragile coalitions and the orchestrated psychodramas, the book illustrates the complexity of politics, the semi-failures and the delays. However, it also shows the extent to which some of these failures (but we may never know if the failure was suffered or orchestrated) were used to make way for a new setting, lessen the power of certain stakeholders, form new alliances or get an idea across. Although the authors venture parallels with known examples of the Game Theory, this appears overly simplistic in light of the complexity of major European negotiators' strategies and tactics. It is striking to see how determining an experienced minister can be at key moments in history if he or she has a sound network of professionals, political contacts and personal relations, and has grasped just how far his or her interlocutors and colleagues are prepared to go in negotiations. The role of economists pales in the shadow of the panache of some of these European stakeholders. Throughout the book, however, we can discern the role of the most visionary agricultural economists such as Allan Buckwell, Louis-Pascal Mahé and a few others, who managed to provide decision-makers with frames of reference to define the main objectives.

Even if it was not the authors' intention, on finishing this book, I still had the impression that, during these years, the Commission was guardian of the collective interest and the long term, often in the face of a large section of the Council. The decades during which Jacques Delors, Ray MacSharry and Franz Fischler succeeded in going beyond the role prescribed for the Commission in order to get the CAP out of its deadlock now appear to be over. Reading this book also confirms that the GATT and, later, WTO negotiations did not play a crucial role in CAP reforms. The 1992 and 1999 reforms were made for internal reasons, even if restrictions on subsidised exports influenced how instruments were defined. For the 2003 reforms, the authors make it clear that the perspective of the Cancun meeting put the Commission in an awkward position with regard to the "blue box", but here again, it is difficult to deny that the reform's determining factors and motivations were internal. In this regard, the chapter addressing consultations with negotiators would have been worth developing further since many of these negotiators rank multilateral negotiation as being one of the essential factors for reforms.

The book's only flaw is, perhaps, that the central, historical perspective does not necessarily shed light on future negotiations. It is hard to know what will remain valid in the post-Lisbon institutional framework. We do not yet really know how the balance of power has been tipped, nor if the Commission's modest role observed these last months is a conjunctural trend or not. The considerable powers given to a very unpredictable European Parliament (which, without the Council's determination to defend national interests, remains conservative with regard to agriculture) has changed the game radically. History will probably not repeat itself, but this is certainly a book worth reading.

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