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## FOREWORD

When the initiative of Andrea Ott to write a Handbook on the legal aspects of the next enlargement of the European Union was first brought to my attention, I must confess my initial reluctance and even scepticism at its feasibility. Of course, I did see the great merits of the concept of such a venture. A handbook implies precision, simplicity and a great deal of mental discipline in order to cover the full breadth of the topic and thus facilitate the readers' understanding, especially by providing the necessary source material for further research. The European Union had already declared its readiness to embark upon a massive enlargement eastwards and this will be the largest ever. It is the EU's official position that enlargement, after all, is vital to achieving the ideals of prosperity, peace and security in Europe as a whole. If all goes according to plan, in 2004 the EU anticipates extending its borders to take in eight Central and East European countries as well as Cyprus and Malta. Moreover, the Union's enlargement policy reaches even further afield to include the Balkan countries. Seen in this context, the enlargement process is a complex and ever changing one and any attempt to demystify it, such as that involved in putting together a handbook on the subject, is most welcome.

But the pitfalls of enlargement cannot be ignored. The last fifteen years of the twentieth century have been characterised by a constant revision of the Union's founding Treaties, and the urgent need for further revision is vital to the functioning of an enlarged Union. The expansion and diversity of the fields of the Union's activities and the *acquis communautaire* since the last enlargement in 1995, not to mention the legal and financial instruments of today's pre-accession strategy, have led experts in the field to focus their research on specific aspects of pre-accession. In the wider European and global contexts, the Union is facing many uncertainties, not least regarding how both cohesion and progress can be guaranteed in what will come to be the World's largest and most integrated regional integration. As for enlargement, the fast moving pre-accession efforts (political, economic and legal) of the EU and the candidate countries, the increasingly complicated web of pre-accession instruments, as well as the vast array of related source material emanating from the European Institutions and the candidate countries mean that few EC/EU law specialists now even attempt to cover the entire process or predict its outcome.

Most striking to me was the fact that, because of the way that it has been conceived, the Handbook on European Enlargement will continue to be useful despite the constant developments in the pre-accession process and even after the first accessions. For example, each of the candidates' constitutional systems is dealt with for the purposes of understanding the relationship between domestic and international law, which gives a stimulating comparative dimension. By way of another example, the chapters on the *acquis communautaire* provide an analysis of the relevant EU legislation and the rationale underlying it, while the main progress and hurdles facing the candidates are treated immediately thereafter.

Certainly, the Handbook on European Enlargement will be a successful practical, legal guide for practitioners and researchers interested in all or part of the process of pre-accession and accession. It outlines the instruments of pre-accession and accession, presents a concrete snapshot of the many chapters of the *acquis communautaire* and reports on the progress made by the candidate countries in their preparations. Over 50 authors drawn from the EU and the candidate countries have contributed their expertise in order to ensure adequate and informed coverage. While the need for simplicity and brevity, due to practical constraints on the size of the final book, proved a considerable challenge, the outcome is a book that reads well, is well structured and organised and is surprisingly easy to dip into for reference purposes.

The Handbook on European Enlargement should prove a valuable tool for anyone seeking a better legal understanding of the overall enlargement project of the Union. It works according to a simple methodology that aims to give the reader a broad, legal overview and analysis of the enlargement project. Part I addresses the legal, political and historical background to this enlargement while Part II deals with the international and national legal orders. Of particular interest is Chapter 2 of Part II which provides an analysis of the legal status in the candidate countries of their association agreements with EU. In Part III, twenty-eight chapters are dedicated to the actual content of the *acquis communautaire* and give an impression of the work that has been done by both the candidates and the EU as of the end of March 2002 as well as a look at the work remaining.

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