

Anca Raluca Iuhas

*Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking in the European Union. Cooperation from a Legislative, Institutional and Law Enforcement Perspective. Case Study on Romania*

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Review by *Roxana Ivașca*<sup>1</sup>



The book published by Anca Raluca Iuhas in 2024 under the aegis of the University of Oradea Publishing House, the author's doctoral thesis, tackles one of the most sensitive and challenging topics in our society in recent years: human trafficking (HT).

The title of this extremely rigorous and comprehensive research in the field of international relations *Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking in the European Union. Cooperation from a Legislative, Institutional and Law Enforcement Perspective. Case Study on Romania* announces from the very beginning its inter- and transdisciplinary perspective, and ambitious goals.

The paper uses a multilayered analysis to explore the legislative and institutional frameworks, mechanisms, and law enforcement practices currently used for EU transnational cooperation concerning the prevention and combating of human trafficking, with a case study on the Romanian context.

The author's undertaking emerges both from a personal concern and the realization that human trafficking continues to present multiple

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challenges to the European Union and its Member States (MS), faced with a constant pressure to develop viable solutions to this continuously expanding phenomenon, in all its proliferating forms.

According to Eurostat statistics, 10,793 victims of human trafficking were registered in the EU in 2023 alone, which is a 6.9% increase compared to 2022 and the highest recorded value in the period from 2008 to 2023 (Eurostat, 2025). This emphasizes an increasing trend over a time frame of 15 years.

In this regard, Anca Raluca Iuhas addresses some of the most significant challenges in transnational cooperation to combat human trafficking, particularly in identifying victims and investigating such cases. She focuses on the difficulties Romania faces when cooperating with destination countries where Romanian victims are identified, especially in the absence of a much-needed European Transnational Referral Mechanism.

Aware of her paper's possible limitations due to the subject's complexity, the author not only proves the validity of most of her preliminary hypotheses, ensuring a strong basis for the understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon, but also, most importantly, she provides solutions to pressing issues and makes valuable recommendations for improving future policies at the EU and national levels, with significant impact on the fight against human trafficking (HT).

The book proves to be all the more relevant considering Romania's current situation, as the top source country for victims of human trafficking in the EU for more than a decade, while also in the midst of implementing the Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as the upcoming GRETA's fourth country report on Romania.

Structured into five chapters, along with an introductory section, conclusions, and a section on public policy recommendations, complemented by a vast and relevant bibliography and substantial annexes, the book proves to be instrumental for understanding key concepts related to human trafficking (HT), the legal context and the institutional mechanisms underlying transnational and cross-border cooperation in combating and preventing HT within the EU. The book also covers legal variations across different Member States, current challenges, and necessary measures to develop appropriate solutions and referral mechanisms.

The first chapter grounds the research from a methodological standpoint, while also setting out its main objectives, in a deliberate effort *"to contribute to the academic discourse surrounding transnational*

*cooperation in the area of preventing and combating human trafficking within the EU and to offer insights and recommendations that can support policy decisions and law enforcement strategies."*

Using a modern, interdisciplinary methodology, the author easily navigates complex concepts at the intersection of international relations, law and political science. She explores an extensive bibliography and thoroughly analyzes primary and secondary sources, official documents, databases, literature in the field, and case law.

The second chapter, *Theoretical Framework and Conceptualization of the Cross-border Cooperation in the Area of Human Trafficking*, resorts to an in-depth analysis of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the international cooperation in general and cross-border cooperation in particular, as they pertain to preventing and combating HT. This analysis is conducted through the lens of three main international relations (IR) theories: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Thus, it provides a strong basis for exploring EU legislation and policies around this topic, which are addressed further in the next chapter.

Following her multi-layered analysis of each IR theory at the individual, state, and international systems levels, the author reaches an intriguing conclusion. She pleads for a reconsideration of the state's responsibility and response capacity, especially with regard to counter-trafficking. She notes the necessity of a paradigm shift in the security discourse on HT, as "*it is evident that traditional state-centric security approaches have become outdated, particularly in the complex realm of counter-trafficking. In this multi-dimensional issue, it's imperative to consider new security perspectives. The role of the state in the security discourse on HT cannot be exclusive or primary anymore, although it should not be disregarded either.*"

According to the author there is a direct link between using an inclusive approach on the matter and the possibility of designing optimal anti-trafficking policies and fostering cooperation across different levels and among various actors.

On this matter, Cornelius Friesendorf states in his 2007 article that human trafficking (HT) is an issue that can only be solved within a security governance system, where all macro- and micro-actors need to cooperate effectively to reach any positive and lasting results (Friesendorf, 2007).

The third chapter, titled *The Legislative, Policy and Institutional Framework of the EU in the Area of Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking*, showcases EU's legislative, policy and institutional frameworks. This chapter uses qualitative research methods, such as content and thematic analyses of official documents, scientific articles, international

organizations' guidelines, anti-trafficking EU strategies, progress reports and monitoring mechanisms. It also compares the EU anti-trafficking monitoring mechanism with the Council of Europe's (CoE) mechanism to assess its effectiveness.

By focusing on three pillars—legislation, policy and institutions—and examining relevant cases and examples, the author establishes a conceptual basis and reliable perspective on the whole process of combating HT, prompting a proper understanding of this complex phenomenon and creating a solid reference point for subsequently analyzing the Romanian legislation and the shortcomings of the anti-trafficking frameworks.

Chapter 4, *The Legislative, Policy and Institutional Framework of Romania in the Area of Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking*, is an essential part of the book, coagulating the author's findings and recommendations, derived from a thorough evaluation of human trafficking in Romania as compared to the EU, and Romania's compliance with international and EU standards.

Following a comparative analysis of statistics on HT from 2011 to 2021 concerning Romanian victims of HT and perpetrators, or persons suspected, prosecuted and convicted of HT and based on a selection of relevant Case Studies analyzed, the author identifies two major areas of concern: the lack of proactive identification of the victims of trafficking and the limited cooperation between Romania and countries of destination in assisting the victims.

While pinpointing the system's deficiencies, with a focus on those that impede the efficiency of transnational cooperation in cases involving the sexual exploitation of victims abroad, the paper also makes a case of proposing strategies for improving the national legal and judicial system, which also stands for one of the main merits of this book.

The fifth chapter, *European Cooperation in Transnational Human Trafficking Cases*, explores the topic of transnational cooperation in the EU concerning HT, with a focus on cooperation between Romania and other EU countries regarding sexual exploitation. This chapter is based on qualitative research involving 17 interviews with anti-HT experts and practitioners (15 Romanian experts and 2 foreign experts) and a written response from the Romanian Police General Inspectorate.

After corroborating interview results, case studies and analyzed data, the author was able to identify the vulnerabilities of transnational cooperation regarding human trafficking cases, particularly sexual exploitation. This was accomplished by examining the deficient cooperation between Romania and other Member States (MS) and analyzing different

legal approaches toward prostitution in various EU MS, as reflected in the different outcomes of investigation of such cases, thus pointing out to the urgency of establishing a European Transnational Referral Mechanism and a cohesive European legislation model on prostitution and HT investigation.

The expertise provided by the interviewees proved to be extremely valuable. Together with the author's own findings, it enabled her to develop a recommendations section, adding a practical dimension to the research and showcasing the necessary reforms and steps to be taken for improving future policymaking. These reforms would increase the number of identified victims and support the authorities more efficiently in investigating HT cases.

Adopting a modern, transdisciplinary approach that combines critical thinking, a comparative perspective, and an analytical approach with a complete mastery of a sophisticated conceptual apparatus, the author sharply identifies misalignments, omissions and dysfunctionalities in the legal frameworks surrounding HT in the EU, issues partly due to the extremely diverse political spectrum of the EU Member States and of their equivalent mechanisms. What makes her endeavor stand out, however, is the author's ability to propose appropriate solutions with a real impact in the fight against human trafficking, going beyond a mere assessment of this phenomenon.

In this respect, the book proves to be a valuable resource, making a significant contribution to academic discourse and specialist literature on HT, both at European and national levels.

### **Bibliography**

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