

Review Template – Associate Professor

1. Information about the procedure

Habilitation procedure for the academic position of *Associate Professor* at the American University in Bulgaria, conducted in accordance with Bulgarian legislation. The procedure falls within Higher Education Area **3. Social and Economic Sciences and Law**, professional field **3.3. Political Sciences** and has been announced in the Bulgarian **State Gazette, Issue 77, dated 19 September 2025**.

The evaluation below is based on the *Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act*, the Rules for its implementation, the internal AUBG rules, regulations, and policies, including the *Habilitation Procedure*, and the additional requirements for the procedure advertised on the AUBG website.

Candidate: **Senior Assistant¹ Professor Jean Crombois, Ph.D.**, American University in Bulgaria

Reviewer: prof. Anna Krasteva,

New Bulgarian University, [CERMES](#) & Dept. of Political Sciences

2. Confirmation of the Candidate’s Eligibility for Admission to the Habilitation Procedure

Dr. Jean Crombois was admitted to the habilitation procedure based on full compliance with the requirements listed in Enclosures 1, 2, and 3 to this document. In quantitative terms, Dr. Jean Crombois’s research results exceed the Minimum National Requirements (MNR) for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.3 Political Science (Enclosure 3).

¹ As per the Bulgarian legislation

3. Qualitative Evaluation of the Candidate's Achievements

3.1. Dr. Jean Crombois' research interests include European integration from both historical and theoretical perspectives, with a focus on its evolution during the Cold War, as well as recent developments; EU policy toward the Eastern Partnership and enlargement; and the foreign policy of the EU and its Member States, particularly that of Bulgaria since 2014.

3.2. Dr. Jean F. Crombois self-evaluates himself as a mature scholar with international recognition and significant quantitative impact. The purpose of this review is to assess this self-evaluation, as well as his scholarly production, impact and reception within academia.

In quantitative terms the research output of Dr. Crombois exceeds the national requirements: 2 published books; 9 Articles and reports published in non-indexed peer-reviewed editions or edited collective volumes; 4 Articles and reports published in academic editions that are indexed in world renowned academic databases; 1 Study published in academic editions that are indexed in world-renowned academic databases; 2 Studies published in non-indexed peer reviewed journals or edited collective volumes.

The general research profile—reflected in three monographs, more than twenty journal articles, over fifteen book chapters, forty conference presentations, four Jean Monnet modules, three externally funded projects, more than ten peer reviews, over twenty guest lectures, and consistently positive reviews of the monograph—further confirms the candidate's mature scholarly status.

The International Career as an Epistemic Trajectory: Diversifying Perspectives Inside, Outside, and Beyond Europe

A defining feature of Dr. Crombois's academic profile is that his international career is not merely biographical; it is epistemic. His trajectory - from Belgium to Oxford, Morocco, Brussels, and Bulgaria - has produced a distinctive way of seeing Europe and international politics. This mobility has generated a form of reflexive distance that allows him to analyze European integration simultaneously from within, from the margins, and from outside—a relatively rare and intellectually productive positionality.

Working “inside” Europe, Dr. Crombois is deeply embedded in the traditions of European studies, EU governance, and integration theory. His scholarship demonstrates full command of institutional dynamics, policy instruments, and the normative architecture of the EU. Yet, unlike many scholars who remain confined to an internalist perspective, he destabilizes Eurocentric self-descriptions by introducing external vantage points. His experience in Morocco and his sustained engagement with the EU's neighbourhood policies cultivate an “outside” perspective, attentive to how European power is perceived, negotiated, and resisted beyond the Union's borders. Equally important is his long-term

positioning in Bulgaria - a member state that is both “inside” the EU and structurally peripheral to its core. This location enables a liminal perspective: Europe seen from its edges. Bulgaria is neither an external “other” nor a central agenda-setter. It is a site where European norms, geopolitical pressures, historical legacies, and domestic context intersect. Dr. Crombois transforms this positionality into analytical advantage. Rather than treating peripherality as a constraint, he turns it into a theoretical lens for understanding asymmetry, vulnerability, and agency within integrative regimes. This triangulation—inside, outside, beyond—underpins one of the originalities of his conceptual and empirical work.

Scholarly achievements

I’ll structure the analysis and evaluation of the achievements in two parts: the monograph and the key publications in the field of European integration, enlargement policy, international relations and foreign policy.

Monograph

The monograph “Camille Gutt and Postwar International Finance” (Pickering & Chatto, 2011; Routledge paperback, 2016) constitutes an important scholarly contribution at the intersection of financial history and international relations. Centered on the career of Camille Gutt - Belgian statesman, architect of postwar monetary arrangements, and first Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund - the book transcends the genre of political biography and offers an informed case study of international financial diplomacy as a formative dimension of twentieth-century international order.

The book elaborates two interconnected perspectives: first, that individual agency matters in the construction of international institutions; and second, that the postwar economic order cannot be understood without reference to the interwar experiences and regional experiments that shaped elite perceptions and strategies. It introduces a small-state perspective that, while present in the literature has remained under-theorized in the specific context of international financial diplomacy and the early architecture of the global economic governance.

The monograph has a chronological structure of five analytically coherent chapters. The first reconstructs Gutt’s interwar career, situating him within Belgian political economy and the evolving landscape of European financial governance. This chapter demonstrates how interwar crises shaped his understanding of monetary stability, sovereignty, and cooperation. The second chapter examines Gutt’s participation in the London discussions on postwar monetary and financial order. It is emphasized that the debates preceding Bretton Woods were not merely technical but deeply political, shaped by divergent national experiences and by the policymakers’ memories of interwar breakdown of monetary cooperation. The third chapter turns to Gutt’s regional vision, embodied in the Benelux project. The author reveals how European integration had roots in financial diplomacy and in small-state strategies to regain sovereignty through cooperation. Chapter four situates Gutt within the Bretton Woods negotiations. The book analyses the tensions between universal rules and national constraints, between the ideal of multilateralism and

the reality of asymmetric power. The final chapter examines Gutt's tenure as the first Managing Director of the IMF (1946–1951). This period is reconstructed as a laboratory of postwar governance, marked by the challenges of European reconstruction, the emergence of the Cold War, and the limits of early multilateralism.

The analysis is realistic in acknowledging that Belgium's contribution in general, and Gutt's in particular, to international debates was limited. At the same time, the author demonstrates that this perspective offers an alternative narrative of post-war reconstruction, one that emphasizes an aversion to political intervention in monetary policy. These conclusion resonates strongly in today's context.

The monograph makes three theoretical contributions.

First, it valorizes agency in the study of international institutions. Against structural accounts that privilege great powers or systemic logics, Dr. Crombois demonstrates how individual actors, particularly from small states, can shape outcomes through expertise, credibility, and strategic positioning. Gutt's career illustrates how personal authority and professional capital can translate into institutional influence. This insight resonates with contemporary political science debates on leadership, epistemic communities, and technocratic power.

Second, the book challenges the narrative of rupture that often characterizes accounts of 1945. By tracing continuities between interwar cooperation and postwar institutions, Dr. Crombois shows that Bretton Woods was not a tabula rasa but a reconfiguration of earlier experiments and failures. This historical depth enriches international relations theory by revealing how ideas, practices, and expectations travel across systemic breaks.

Third, the monograph theorizes the relationship between regional and global orders.

Methodologically, the book is exemplary. It draws on extensive archival research in Belgian, British, and international repositories, including IMF materials. Dr. Crombois combines biographical reconstruction with institutional analysis, moving between micro-level decision-making and macro-level structural change.

The major conclusion is particularly relevant to the dynamic contemporary international context: the postwar international financial system emerged not as a coherent blueprint, but as a negotiated and contested order shaped by individuals, memories, regional experiments and international innovations. Camille Gutt becomes the prism through which this complexity is made visible.

Evaluation of key publications in the cluster of European integration and Foreign policy

Relevance and Coherence of the Research Agenda

The relevance of Dr. Crombois's research agenda lies in its sustained engagement with the most pressing political challenges facing Europe today: war on the continent, conflict management in the neighborhood, the fragility of European security, and the stalled integration of the Western Balkans. What gives this agenda particular strength is not only

its topicality, but its long-term coherence. Dr. Crombois has not followed events opportunistically; rather, his work demonstrates how a stable analytical core has enabled him to anticipate, interpret, and theorize crises as they unfold.

Dr. Crombois examines Europe as a political project exposed to external shocks and internal tensions. His research has long focused on the EU's capacity to act beyond its borders, the dilemmas of neighborhood governance, and the vulnerability of small states within asymmetric systems. When the Russian invasion of Ukraine transformed European politics, his conceptual framework was already in place. This allowed him to move immediately beyond descriptive commentary and offer a structured analysis of how war reshapes domestic politics, alliance behavior, and foreign policy orientation in EU member states.

His recent work on Bulgaria's pro-Western turn after 2022 exemplifies this coherence. The war in Ukraine is not treated as an isolated rupture but as a critical juncture revealing deeper dynamics: the politicization of foreign policy, the role of party competition, and the fragility of elite consensus in small states. By situating Bulgaria within a broader European pattern of contested alignment, Dr. Crombois transforms a national case into a window on the EU's strategic transformation under conditions of war.

The same coherence characterizes his work on conflict management and EU neighborhood policies. Before the current geopolitical escalation, Dr. Crombois analysed the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership as arenas where the EU's normative ambitions encounter geopolitical realities. His studies of "frozen conflicts," EU mediation efforts, and the limits of conditionality revealed structural weaknesses in the EU's external action: lack of coherence, ambiguous objectives, and tension between values and interests. These insights now appear prescient in light of the war in Ukraine, which exposed the fragility of the post-Cold War European order and the insufficiency of technocratic approaches to security.

Equally topical is his sustained engagement with the European integration of the Western Balkans. Dr. Crombois has consistently argued that enlargement is not a peripheral or technical policy, but a central dimension of Europe's geopolitical credibility. His work demonstrates how the stagnation of accession processes fuels democratic backsliding, opens space for rival powers, and erodes the EU's transformative capacity. In the context of renewed great-power competition and instability at Europe's borders, this analysis acquires heightened strategic relevance. Enlargement emerges in his work not as a bureaucratic routine, but as a test of Europe's ability to shape its own security environment.

What unifies these strands—war in Ukraine, conflict management, neighborhood policy, and Western Balkans integration—is the analytical question: how does the European Union respond to instability at its borders, and how do these responses reshape both Europe and its member states? Dr. Crombois approaches this question across time and space, connecting long-term structural dilemmas with immediate political crises.

Methodological Rigor and Analytical Complexity

Dr. Crombois's work is distinguished by a combination of methodological precision, conceptual innovation, and analytical depth. His scholarship does not merely apply established frameworks in political science and international relations; it extends them by introducing new analytical categories and by embedding political phenomena within broader historical, communicative, and institutional contexts. I'll highlight three interrelated dimensions: conceptual novelty, analytical complexity, and an interdisciplinary understanding of political sciences.

A defining feature of Dr. Crombois's methodology is his capacity to identify and apply original concepts. I'll illustrate with two examples. The notion of *token autonomy* captures the subtle strategies by which small member states formally align with EU policies while symbolically distancing themselves in domestic politics. This concept moves beyond binary models of compliance versus resistance and introduces a dynamic, politically embedded understanding of Europeanization. It reveals how foreign policy positioning is shaped not only by external constraints but by the need to manage domestic legitimacy and contestation.

The concept of *incommunication* is of interdisciplinary inspiration, adapted from the communication theory of Dominique Wolton and applied to EU–Russia relations. It offers a novel way of conceptualizing diplomatic breakdown not as a temporary failure, but as a structural condition of interaction. By reframing sanctions and mutual misunderstanding as products of systemic incommunication, Dr. Crombois opens a new analytical space for understanding conflict in international politics.

Dr. Crombois's work is marked by a high degree of theoretical complexity. He consistently operates at the intersection of multiple paradigms: Europeanization and politicization, normative power and geopolitics, small-state theory and foreign policy analysis. Rather than choosing between these frameworks, he places them in dialogue, exposing their tensions and complementarities. This is particularly evident in his analyses of EU neighborhood policy and the war in Ukraine. He demonstrates that European foreign policy cannot be understood through a single explanatory logic. It is simultaneously shaped by institutional routines, normative self-understandings, geopolitical constraints, and domestic political struggles. His work offers layered explanations in which systemic pressures, ideational frames, and party politics interact.

Methodologically, this complexity is sustained by careful empirical design. Parliamentary voting records, party positions, strategic documents, and public discourse are analyzed within a coherent analytical architecture.

While firmly anchored in political science, Dr. Crombois's scholarship is informed by an interdisciplinary sensibility. History provides depth and helps explain contemporary constraints; communication studies illuminate the politics of misunderstanding; European studies supply institutional texture. Interdisciplinarity serves to refine political explanation. Political science and international relations remains the organizing core:

research questions concern foreign policy change, governance, contestation, and strategic choice.

Theoretical and Applied Contributions

Dr. Crombois's theoretical contribution to political science and international relations is both substantial and innovative. His work advances the field along four interconnected axes: the theory of small states; the reconceptualization of foreign policy as embedded in domestic political dynamics; the comparative analysis of enlargement through normative and geopolitical paradigms; and the elevation of Bulgaria from a peripheral case to a site of theory production.

1. Small States as Strategic Actors

A central contribution of Dr. Crombois's scholarship lies in his theorization of small states within integrative and asymmetric systems such as the European Union. Moving beyond traditional portrayals of small states as passive norm-takers or structurally constrained actors, he demonstrates how they exercise agency through strategic positioning, symbolic distancing, and selective alignment.

His concept of token autonomy captures this dynamic with particular precision. This approach enriches the literature on Europeanization and small-state theory by introducing a politically embedded understanding of compliance, one that accounts for domestic contestation, populist pressures, and elite strategies. Through this lens, small states emerge not as marginal, but as analytically central to understanding how integration functions under conditions of asymmetry. Dr. Crombois thus transforms small-state studies from a descriptive subfield into a theoretical vantage point on power, vulnerability, and agency in contemporary Europe.

2. Foreign Policy as Domestic Politics: Parties, Populism, and Democratic Backsliding

I particularly appreciate Dr. Crombois's theorization of foreign policy as deeply intertwined with domestic political context and conflict. His work systematically bridges international relations and comparative politics by demonstrating that foreign policy change is not merely a response to external shocks, but a product of internal political dynamics. He links foreign policy orientation to phenomena such as democratic backsliding and populism. In his analyses of Bulgaria after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, foreign policy becomes a site of partisan struggle, elite fragmentation, and ideological polarization. This approach moves beyond state-centric models and embeds foreign policy within the broader processes of democratic erosion, and populist trends.

3. Enlargement Between Normative Power and Geopolitics

Several publications analyse the coexistence and growing tension between two paradigms of European external action. The first is the normative approach, rooted in transformation through values, conditionality, and institutional approximation. The second is the

geopolitical approach, oriented toward influence, stability, and strategic competition. Rather than choosing between these paradigms, Dr. Crombois theorizes their interaction. He shows how EU policy oscillates between them, producing ambiguity, inconsistency, and declining credibility. This tension is illustrated across multiple empirical terrains: the Eastern Partnership, relations with Russia, and the Western Balkans. Enlargement appears not as a linear process but as a contested field in which Europe's identity as an international actor is negotiated. This framework moves the debate beyond technical assessments of conditionality or accession fatigue. It situates enlargement at the heart of European political theory, as a test of whether the EU can reconcile its normative self-understanding with the realities of power politics.

4. Bulgaria as a Site of Theory Production

Dr. Crombois's work transforms Bulgaria from a peripheral case into an analytical lens for understanding Europe itself. Rather than treating Bulgaria as an exception or laggard, he shows how its political trajectory reveals structural tensions within the EU: between East and West, normativity and geopolitics, integration and contestation. The country becomes a laboratory for studying how European norms are internalized, resisted, or instrumentalized under conditions of populism and democratic fragility.

These contributions establish Dr. Crombois as a theorist of Europe under conditions of asymmetry, contestation, and geopolitical stress. His work redefines small states as strategic actors, embeds foreign policy in domestic politics, reframes enlargement as a clash of paradigms, and transforms Bulgaria into a site of theoretical innovation. This constellation of contributions significantly advances political science and international relations in Europe.

It is important to emphasize that these contributions are not derivative or merely synthetic, but genuinely personal and original. Dr. Crombois does not simply apply established theoretical frameworks to new empirical material; he consistently reshapes those frameworks in light of his findings.

Citations and Impact

The publications of Dr. Crombois have long been in active international scholarly circulation, as evidenced by a high number of citations and formal recognitions. While the minimum requirement for Associate Professor is 50 points, the candidate has accumulated almost nine times more - 430 points in total - of which 240 points derive from citations or reviews in indexed academic journals, monographs, and collective volumes listed in world-renowned databases.

The citations reflect sustained and geographically wide scholarly interest in his work across political science, international relations, European studies, and economic history. His publications are cited in leading journals and major international publishers (Routledge, Cambridge University Press, Springer, Brill, Palgrave), and by scholars working

in diverse academic traditions—from Central and Eastern to Western Europe and North America to the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

The same strong pattern of interest and recognition applies to the monograph “Camille Gutt and Postwar International Finance”. The book is cited in contemporary research on Bretton Woods, IMF history, European integration, and international financial governance, confirming its position as an authoritative reference in the field. Its scholarly value is further attested by the decision to republish the volume in paperback with Routledge in 2016.

These indicators testify to a level of international visibility and impact that significantly exceeds habilitation standards and firmly establishes the candidate as a scholar of recognized authority.

The impact of Dr. Crombois’s expertise extends beyond academia. His analyses of EU–Russia relations, enlargement, and small-state geopolitics, published in *La Libre Belgique*, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, *Eurocréative*, *Visegrad Insight*, and *Democracy and Society*, contribute to informed public debate on pressing and strategic political issues.

I would also like to add my personal academic impressions. I know Dr. Crombois in three capacities: as an international scholar, as an engaged member of the national academic community, as a cooperative and communicative colleague. He has published an article in Brill’s journal *Southeastern Europe* - I have the honor to be the editor-in-chief - following a rigorous double-blind review process. He has also contributed to the journal’s work as a reviewer, providing competent and constructively critical assessments.

Dr. Crombois is a very active member of the academic community in Bulgaria and participates in numerous conferences, workshops and other events. He enjoys a strong reputation as a communicative, collegial, and cordial colleague.

4. Critical remarks and recommendations

Questions

The corpus submitted for habilitation is impressive in its coherence, topicality, and international impact yet some constructive questions could contribute to further theoretical refinement and future research development:

1. The relationship between foreign policy, on the one hand, and party politics and populism, on the other, is among the most innovative aspects of the work. At times, however, the analysis tends to juxtapose politics and policy—foreign policy and party competition—as if they interacted directly, without sufficiently theorising the mediating role of government institutions, executive leadership, and decision-making arenas. This

raises an important conceptual question: through which concrete mechanisms do party dynamics and populist narratives translate into foreign policy choices? Clarifying these pathways would strengthen the analytical coherence of the model and enhance its explanatory power.

2. On normative vs. geopolitical paradigms of enlargement. How does this framework account for differentiated integration and “fast-track” enlargement under wartime conditions? Can the normative approach endure within the emerging transactionalist style of international relations? And how, more concretely, could a third paradigm be conceptualised and defined?
3. The transformation of Bulgaria into a site of theory production is one of the strongest features of the corpus. Which characteristics and processes reveal more general mechanisms of peripheral Europeanisation, and which remain context-specific? Clarifying this distinction would enhance the analytical transferability of the Bulgarian case and strengthen its contribution to comparative European studies.
4. How stable and sustainable is Bulgaria’s pro-Western reorientation since 2022?

5. Conclusion and recommendation

Dr. Crombois fully meets and significantly exceeds all quantitative and qualitative requirements for the position of associate professor. His work demonstrates intellectual autonomy, international recognition, and sustained impact on key debates concerning European integration, EU foreign policy, enlargement, and the role of small states. Dr. Crombois is a mature scholar whose contributions strengthen both Bulgarian and European political science.

I give an unequivocal and categorical positive recommendation for the appointment of Dr. Jean F. Crombois to the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.3. Political Science.

Signature:

Date: 19.01.26