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Boekbespreking van: Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations

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Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek (eds.), *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations*. Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science 5, London: Routledge 1998. ISBN 0-415-16486-9. £ 55.00.

This volume grew out of a European Consortium for Political Research project on international institutions linking scholars from the Netherlands, the UK, Germany and North America. It presents a set of integrated case studies that explore the discretionary impact of international agencies on policy-making by national governments and by the agencies themselves. The authors ask if recent changes in world politics – the end of the Cold War and the growing impact of globalization – have been paralleled by an increase in autonomous influence on policy outputs.

Two chapters survey possible approaches to answering the question. Hadewych Hazelzet suggests that Robert W. Cox and Harold K. Jacobson's classic 1973 study, *The Anatomy of Influence*, remains relevant. Hazelzet hypothesizes that Cox and Jacobson's conclusions are still valid, especially their verdict that autonomy is largely a consequence of the relative insignificance of a specific organization's remit to its most powerful members. Verbeek's more comprehensive survey of approaches reaches a slightly different conclusion, arguing that the public choice literature suggests three mechanisms that can be used by the governors of international organizations to give them autonomy. Secretariats can 1) build coalitions with subnational pressure groups; 2) monopolize expert knowledge; and 3) promote the use of legal procedures to protect and oversee international policy implementation.

Michael Nicholson's chapter on the UNEP and the Mediterranean Action Plan provides the most consistent demonstration of this approach, and, significantly, shows the compatibility between a sophisticated rational choice explanation and one that centres on knowledge-based epistemic communities. To a lesser degree, the other chapters also emphasize the same mechanisms and demonstrate a growing autonomy not only of the UNEP but also the IAEA (relative to the non-proliferation regime), the OSCE, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Commission, and UNEP monetary organizations. In contrast, consistent with Cox and Jacobson, NATO, with its high saliency to its most powerful members, gained no autonomy and the ILO may have lost some of its autonomous roles due to the increasingly active WTO.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, much of the value of the book comes not from the analysis that directly answers the central research question, but from the complex, specific histories that must be explicated in order to respond to the question. In Andreas Nölke and Gerrit Stratmann's discussion of the role of international financial institutions supporting East European reforms, and in Nicholas Bayne's discussion of the post-Cold War work of the IMF, WTO, and OECD the authors point to significant new patterns. These international agencies, whether autonomous from their most powerful members or not, are taking on more tasks in more arenas than ever before. Bayne emphasizes that this may foreshadow greater autonomy in the future. The WTO's dispute resolution mechanism may become an example of the juridification that has

allowed the European Court of Human Rights and the European monetary organizations their greater autonomy. The greater reliance on the IMF and World Bank to solve collective problems may lead to giving even greater assets to these organizations, which, in the future, when state members are less concerned with day-to-day oversight, may add up to greater autonomy.

The book ends with a critical reflection on the entire project by Susan Strange. Strange argues that the book is characteristically European: it is concerned about the autonomy of international institutions because Europeans have experience with the power that seems to be consolidated in Brussels. It welcomes the details of history and expects a universal theory of international institutions the way a US study might. And, perhaps because the authors care too much about their informants within international secretariats, the project overlooks deeper questions about whose interests are really served by international institutions – and the state members from which the agencies sometime are and sometimes are not, relatively autonomous.

With Strange's conclusion, the book incorporates most of the criticisms that a reviewer might make. Substantively, I believe the editors could have pushed authors to *learn more about* general patterns if the Western European cases had been separated from the rest. The process of European integration, itself, appears to drive the patterns of autonomy found in the EU, the European Court, and even the OSCE. Putting these cases to one side, the pattern in the 'universal' organizations may, indeed, simply be the one discovered by Cox and Jacobson some 30 years ago. There are some minor problems as well. The book contains a few errors that the editors should have noticed. For example, Robert Cox, rather than Robert Keohane, is identified as the editor of *International Organization* who "broadened its scope to become, in effect, a journal of international political economy" (p. 214).

These are minor criticisms of what is largely an impressive state-of-the-art discussion of what we know about the shifting responsibilities and relative autonomy of some of the most significant international organizations.

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