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## Boekbespreking van: Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders

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For its part, the European Union benefits from emerging at the conclusion of this narrative of historical adaptation. The institutional role of the European Court of Justice is precisely to determine where the competence of the member states extends and where the competence of the European Union should prevail. Moreover, the experience of both the United States and Switzerland suggest that such institutional determination of competence is useful to maintain order even as the Dutch experience suggests the pitfalls of insisting on an absolute (or contested) conception of state sovereignty. The incidence of subordinate resistance in the European Union has not eroded despite the existence of national sovereignty. Rather, the notion of national sovereignty has been adapted to the need to mitigate resistance to supranational authority within the European Union. The difference between this telling of the argument and Professor Goldstein's is that it is resistance – and not the notion of sovereignty – which is exogenous to the problem of political organization. And it is “the political ethos of the day” (p. 74) – particularly with regard to the prevailing understanding of sovereignty – that is the proper subject for analysis.

Professor Goldstein does an admirable job bringing the European Union into comparative context. In so doing, however, she has not closed the debate on European political organization. She has opened it. The comparative analysis of the European Union offers a crucial layer of insight that should not be ignored either in our interpretation of the role of specific institutions or in our analysis of the whole of the integration process. Professor Goldstein argues that we should look to those systems that have centralized over time. However, her conclusion suggests the opposite possibility as well. Perhaps by looking at examples of failed federalism – where subordinate resistance has overwhelmed superordinate authority – we can avoid the pitfalls suggested in the penultimate sentence of *Constituting Federal Sovereignty*. Certainly such analysis offers more promise than any treatment of the European Union as a political organization *sui generis*. Professor Goldstein points us in the right direction. It is a testament to the strength of her argument that she succeeds in unlocking a vital pathway for future research.

Erik Jones

George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, ISBN 0-521-89244-9, £ 15.95.

George Breslauer's new book, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, is impressive: it is a systematic endeavour to marry the particular with the general. It undertakes a study on leadership, but one that is grounded in the detailed examination of the two cases that the author has chosen to examine. In this respect, Professor Breslauer has continued along the same lines as the one he adopted (following Plutarch) twenty years ago when he published, with great success, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1982). In the earlier study Breslauer gained experience in handling

‘parallel lives’. Yet, it was in a sense simpler, since, despite the important roles played by Khrushchev and Brezhnev (Khrushchev in particular) in steering a new political course in the Soviet Union, neither of these leaders ‘broke’ the system. The change was merely an attempt to enable the system to cope better with the reality of political and social life at home and abroad.

Of course, Gorbachev had not wanted to break the system either, he only wished to adjust Soviet politics to the reality of the world of the mid-1980s. But his task was more difficult, indeed impossible, as the rest of the world had moved forward whereas the Soviet Union had remained static, or perhaps even begun to regress. The question arises, therefore, whether Gorbachev was not, in a sense, pushed by events rather than being an ‘event-maker’, to use the expression of Professor Breslauer. The author points out, however, and does so convincingly, that Gorbachev had a vision of what he wanted to see abolished (an oppressive state which was not really a ‘normal’ state) and that he did put an end to the practices and rules which had made that state ‘abnormal’. In this sense he was, therefore, an ‘event-maker’.

Professor Breslauer shows that Gorbachev had to take great care in building up support for his ideas – an activity that took the best part of his first eighteen months in office – before he was in a position to declare openly what he wanted to do and could begin to do it. From then on, Gorbachev was subjected to what Professor Breslauer refers to as the ‘polarization’ of the political system between the extremes of a new nationalism and a return to communism. As a result, except in relation to foreign affairs, he ceased to be a ‘leader’ who was fully in charge of the situation he was in the process of transforming.

At the end of the volume, the author returns to the 1985-91 period to assess whether Gorbachev can therefore be described as someone who was indeed a transformer. The answer has to be mixed. It is obviously true that he destroyed a system without being able to create a new one in the full sense of the word. Yet, Gorbachev did at least create a ‘climate’ of politics, based on tolerance, a substantial dose of real participation, as well as a new vision of international politics, which has remained in existence to this day and which his successor and arch-competitor, Yeltsin, neither destroyed nor even wished to destroy.

If the judgement on Gorbachev is, on balance and despite some reservations, broadly positive, a balanced judgement on Yeltsin is somewhat more difficult to achieve. As Professor Breslauer shows so well, many of the characteristics of Yeltsin's behaviour as the head of Russia were more reminiscent of that of the tsars than of democratic rulers of the contemporary world, especially after the 1993 parliamentary election turned out to be so negative for him (a clear case of ‘polarization’ between communists and nationalists). Admittedly, as was just pointed out, Yeltsin did not abolish the broadly liberal framework that Gorbachev had put in place. Indeed, and unlike Gorbachev who made a mistake in not doing so, he subjected himself to popular suffrage, despite the fact that, in the case of his second term in 1996, the odds seemed to be so strongly against him. Yet, at the same time, the kind of regime Yeltsin fashioned, so to speak, was one closer to ‘pure populism’, with no constraints at all on

the President, than to what is more commonly regarded as constituting a democratic framework.

Moreover, because of the economic policy he followed and in order to maintain the kind of personal rule he was adamant not to see eroded, Yeltsin had to accept – if not even promote – a kind of ‘crony capitalism’, which inevitably led to immense corruption. Professor Breslauer points out that Yeltsin had no desire whatsoever to institutionalize his regime: while he had pushed for the popular election of the president – a post which he coveted and needed to obtain to be able to destroy the basis of Gorbachev’s power – there was no desire whatsoever on his part to build a party. Yet the setting up of a party at his devotion was a prerequisite if the system was to function adequately for him and his successors. In a nutshell, he did not act along the lines of de Gaulle. As Professor Breslauer notes: the new Russia markedly suffered as a result, certainly politically and perhaps in other ways too.

Therefore, conclusions about Yeltsin’s leadership have to be very mixed indeed, as the author points out at the end of the book: “He squandered his accumulated authority but proved to be exceptionally skilled at keeping would-be opponents off-balance and at maintaining his grip on power” (p. 318). A more balanced judgement would be difficult to achieve, while the judgement expressed on Gorbachev is also balanced. Both of these are based on the author’s meticulous collection of the evidence and most careful discussion of the huge number of viewpoints about the two leaders that have appeared in the literature. There is therefore no better way to summarize the significance of the book than to quote from Professor Archie Brown’s comment on the back cover: “...an exceptionally clear-headed analysis of Gorbachev and Yeltsin as transformational leaders....”

Jean Blondel

Peter John, *Local Governance in Western Europe*. London: Sage, 2001. ISBN 0-761-9563-79, € 16.99.

‘Governance’ is the current buzzword within the discipline. All over Europe departments of political science, government and public administration are being converted into institutes, schools and networks of governance. Peter John thinks this trend amounts to more than old wine in new bottles. In *Local Governance in Western Europe* he argues that since the 1980s there have been several important developments that have made old concepts somewhat obsolete. By consequence, “scholars and practitioners need a new vocabulary to describe what has happened” (p. 23). The developments John singles out are the growth of the number of institutions, the increased fragmentation of bureaucracies, the enlarged openness and internationalization of networks, the incorporation by representative democracies of more direct forms of democracy, the increased innovative character of policies, as well as a larger role for political leaders, whose power is increasingly rooted in charisma.

These developments have produced a shift from government to governance, a term he defines both as a “flexible pattern of public decision-making based upon loose networks of individuals” (p. 9) and as the “capacity of governing systems to co-ordinate policy and solve public problems in a complex context” (ibid.). Explicitly positing his work as a study of institutional processes, John’s interest lies in how the shift from government to governance occurred. John’s analysis of these institutional shifts focuses on six themes: shifts in regimes in Europe; the Europeanization of sub-national governance; privatization and the New Public Management; institutional formation and regionalism; leadership and the local executive; and the renewal of local democracy. These chapters are preceded by a short overview of local government systems. John adopts the framework for the classification of European local governments developed by Page and Goldsmith. According to them, local governments are of either the Northern or the Southern type. Northern-type cities have a lot of tasks and enjoy considerable autonomy. Southern-type cities have only limited tasks and autonomy, but are endowed with a relatively high level of access to the central state compared to their Northern counterparts. Each of the substantial chapters consists of a brief overview of, for example, the Europeanization of local governments followed by an empirical assessment of the situation in the different local government systems.

The book suffers from four shortcomings. First, John’s treatment of themes is in many places too sketchy. For example, he states that New Public Management constitutes an “incoherent amalgam of arguments that do not hold together” (p. 100). Such a judgement is hard to assess in the absence of a solid description of what New Public Management is and what is wrong with it. Second, the relation between the different themes and the overarching concept of governance remains ambiguous. For instance, John calls regimes both a central feature and even a pinnacle of governance, but at the same time says that they are only a sub-set of the wider political system. Moreover, he urges us to pay at least as much attention to all the other themes he covers in his book, suggesting they are of equal weight. Third, in his empirical assessment of the shifts in governance in Europe, John surprisingly does not make use of Page and Goldsmith’s framework, but simply gives a country-by-country overview that is, in some cases, embarrassingly short and undocumented. Take, for example, his treatment of the emergence of local leadership in the Netherlands in a chapter that erroneously carries as its header ‘The dynamics of internationalization’ [not a typo HL]. This solely consists of a travel guide-like description of Rotterdam (“It now rivals Amsterdam as a cultural centre” [p. 145]) and its mayor Bram Peper who – although accused of fraud – nevertheless managed to ensure that the harbour of Rotterdam remained the biggest in the world and also attracted the Euro 2000 football tournament. Fourth, John abstains from drawing any firm conclusions about the developments that have taken place. The Europeanization of local governance has led only to a “gradual reorientation of governing systems” (p. 107), while both the chapters on New Public Management and regionalism speak of a “diversity of experiences” (p. 131). In the new framework this is not necessarily problematic