

Book Review

Tatiana Coutto *Université Catholique de Lille*

The EU as International Environmental Negotiator by Tom Delreux
Ashgate (2011), ISBN: 9781409411826 (hb)

Environmental problems are the best example of global agendas – issues of transboundary and/or transdisciplinary character that concern mankind as a whole – that have marked international politics since the end of the Cold War. There is little doubt that the European Union (EU) has become a relevant player in multilateral environmental negotiations. But how is the position sustained by the EU in these negotiations defined? What does the participation in multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) tell us about the EU as a global actor? In *The EU as International Environmental Negotiator*, Tom Delreux addresses the interplay between negotiations at the EU and the international levels in order to understand how the aggregated preferences of Member States may be translated into bargaining power when multilateral agreements are defined.

The analysis of EC/EU participation in international politics has raised concern among scholars and policy makers in Europe and elsewhere. Concepts such as ‘presence’, ‘power’ and ‘actorness’ have helped researchers from various theoretical and methodological orientations to study the importance and the future of this “unidentified political object”, in Jacques Delors’s words. Although Community legislation on environmental protection has significantly developed over the last 25 years, the participation of the EU in the negotiation of multilateral environmental agreements is still defined by Community institutions and member states on a case-by-case basis. Research analyses that examine the factors that account for EU external representation are scarce. Tom Delreux’s study aims at filling this gap in the literature.

The book consists of a methodologically rigorous analysis of the EU decision-making process concerning international environmental negotiations that brings together aspects from Law and Political Science. In nine chapters, Delreux seeks to answer the research question clearly stated in the first pages: which conditions determine the EU negotiator’s discretion vis-à-vis the member states during international negotiations leading to a multilateral environmental agreement? (p. 3). The author addresses this issue by analysing EU representation (who is the EU negotiator?) and participation in eight MEAs signed between 1994 and 2003, and ratified between 1998 and 2008. The entry into force of Lisbon Treaty in 2009 does not compromise the results of Delreux’s book, on the contrary: the extent to which the Treaty may affect the negotiation of future MEAs is also taken into account by the author.

The author spells out the puzzle in the first of nine chapters. The next step is to describe the legal framework amid which the decision-making process with regard to EU external action takes place. The second chapter also summarises the conditions for EU ‘actorness’ - although the author does not use this term - in international negotiations beyond areas

of Community exclusive competence. Delreux concludes the section by discussing the political implications of this permanent negotiation and socialisation process that takes place among member states and EU institutions.

In chapter three, Delreux provides the theoretical foundations of his work, thus adapting the Principal-Agent model in order to deal with the complexity of the EU institutional framework. The comprehensive literature review might prove useful to those using P-A approaches in their research work, and provides guidance to scholars seeking to analyse the EU external action through similar methodological perspectives. The nine variables used in the study (clearly summarised on p. 53) allow for the assessment of the potential for independent action of the EU negotiator, preference homogeneity among principals, and between principals and the agent, the potential costs of no agreement, information asymmetries and the role played by institutional norms in the Council. The last section justifies the selection of the empirical cases that are thoroughly addressed in the subsequent pages.

Chapter four undertakes a systematic comparison of eight MEAs in which the EU has participated, and is therefore the core of the book. The chapter explores the arrangements that have determined who the EU negotiator (the agent) is and their autonomy vis-à-vis member states. However, the empirical cases receive uneven attention from the author in the chapter. One possible reason for that may be the scarcity of information about some of the cases: certain agreements are known to the public, such as the Kyoto Protocol, the UN Convention on Desertification and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, whereas others are less politically sensitive, such as the African-Eurasian Waterbirds Directive. The results (nicely presented in pp. 128-32), show that the EU negotiator's discretion varies considerably across the several cases. Nevertheless, the comparative overview (pp. 126-7) does not seem to be consistent with the considerable amount of research presented in the previous pages. The preliminary conclusions (p. 133) could have been further developed given the relevance of this chapter to the whole book. At this point, the reader may ask him/herself whether all cases and variables can contribute substantively to the analysis of the EU as an environmental negotiator. The relevance of the empirical cases to the research design is brought up in the next sections of the book.

One aspect of EU 'actorness' stressed by Delreux is that the relationship between principals and agent evolves during the negotiation process where both the EU and member states are contracting parties – the so-called 'mixed agreements', a phenomenon studied by Law scholars but underexplored by political scientists. In chapter five, the author subdivides five of the empirical cases (Kyoto Protocol, Aarhus Convention, Cartagena Protocol, and Stockholm Convention on POPs and Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment) in order to incorporate more empirical variation into the research design. The data gathered in the previous chapter are then converted to values that can be used in Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Those who are not familiar with QCA may find the chapter less approachable than the remainder of the book. Nevertheless, the method proves suitable to the analysis, and shows that the external environment is a crucial determinant of the discretion - or the autonomy - of the agent. The last two chapters address the relationship between EU decision-making processes and external action, and discuss the conditions that may provide the EU negotiator with a higher degree of discretion. All in all, Delreux's book adds up to the

debate on EU actorness and provides avenues for further analyses on the evolving role of the EU on multilateral agreements in other policy areas.

This book contributes to narrowing the gap between Law and Political Science, and sheds light on the role played by the EU in a realm as broad as environmental politics. Hence, it provides guidance about how to carry out a serious analysis of EU external action. The research design and rigorous methodology will certainly prove helpful to graduate students – most notably PhD candidates with Law or Political Science backgrounds – and young researchers working on the participation of the EU in multilateral negotiations, environmental politics or qualitative comparative analysis. Hence, certain chapters of the book may be included in syllabi of graduate and undergraduate programmes, as they may raise discussions on the relationship between legal frameworks and political representation as well as on EU performance in various realms and settings. It is not a book to be read in one sitting but to be consulted several times when carrying out research on related topics.

* * *