
The Dynamics of Change in EU Governance, Udo Diedrichs, Wulf Reiners and Wolfgang Wessels (eds.), Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK, 2011, 264 pages, ISBN: 978-1-84844-886-5.

Book Review by Raluca Opreșcu*

This book is the result of a smooth interfusion between different academic disciplines and it piques on the process of governance transformation in the European Union. The authors are three highly rated professors from the University of Cologne that bring their contribution along with other nine fellow researchers. All of them have a solid research background in political sciences and a broad expertise in analyzing the dynamics of the overall development of the EU architecture.

The main hypothesis of the book upholds that it is a high interdependence between governance and deepening the process of integration. As it seeks answers to the question of what changes have taken place in EU governance up to the Lisbon Treaty and which factors have triggered it, the study presents an extensive image of EU governance from multiple perspectives. Decision-making is the core of governance and in the EU context it is typically multi-leveled: the supranational and national levels interact within the common legal framework provided by the European institutions. Due to the enlargements that took place, EU had to cope with the growing plurality in policies therefore the guidelines and instruments of European governance have been modified over the time.

A number of key policy areas such as the social, environmental and cohesion policy are scrutinized in terms of decision and policy-making procedures, legal acts and implementation instruments. Moreover, the book uncovers and zooms on the methods that were used in generating and sustaining the EU policies that comprise the European pillars as well as their alternation. The inquiry is structured in 9 chapters, each of them aiming to reveal the dynamics and evolution of EU governance over the past decades. The chapters are based on the findings of empirical research relevant to this topic. This study provides a synthesis the most relevant empirical research findings, obtained either directly by the contributors (for example, chapters 5, 6 and 9) or by other specialists.

This work is a valuable addition to the fields of economics and political sciences due to the amalgamation of various facets and concepts related to European governance. New institutional theories but also neo-functional and intergovernmental ones have provided guidance for the authors in their attempt to capture the shifts. Governance implies both a structural and a process dimension. This refined book tackles them in a concise and fact-based manner.

The novelty of the contribution arises from the fact that it reviews both the history and the factors that led to the governance transformation, and introduces the Lisbon Treaty

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as a key element of the new stage of institutional development. The book achieves its declared purpose because it is able to provide an unparalleled and complex examination of the governance evolution up to the present time.

EU governance topic is particularly important in this crucial moment the Europe is facing. Understanding the past can hold the key to forecasting the future. The authors investigate the past patterns of the interaction and coordination of social and political actors in their quest to adopt and implement collectively binding decisions. In the last decade, reshaping and reinforcing governance has become a priority for the European Union.

The analysis begins with a chapter dedicated to the role of 'soft law' in this new framework and emphasizes that such instruments provide a much clever approach compared to the 'hard law'. The research shows that during time, there was a certain propensity towards it. This situation is comprehensible and partially justified since soft law serves as a testing ground for new policy initiatives therefore it provides a flexible option and a faster route to legal commitments. The book further continues with an extended overview of the Open Method of Coordination in the context of the EU's cohesion policy as well as for the Common Security and Defense Policy. A whole chapter presents the hefty changes that have been implemented in the areas of justice, freedom and security, especially after the Amsterdam Treaty. Another part brings into light and discusses the pension reforms that have taken place. The text is sprinkled with interesting concepts such as 'key political entrepreneurs', 'window of opportunity' or 'strategic orientation'.

The masterpiece chapter comes at the end of the book when Diedrichs conducts an analysis of the legal architecture of EU from the 1950s until the Treaty of Lisbon, comparing the formal provisions for decision-making, their actual use over time and the shifts that have taken place. At this point, it is undertaken an investigation of treaty-based provisions for the shaping of governing modes. The Lisbon Treaty is perceived as a milestone in the history of the European governance and it is devoted a special focus.

The conclusions of the study pinpoint that the system change was set off by the institutional dynamics at both national and supranational levels. The nature of the policy instruments (whether they are binding or non-binding decision) is switched in the direction of either hard or soft law depending on the sensitivity of the subject and the implications of it. Another revealing fact is that European governance has had little impact on national political structures. EU only recently has gained political weight in terms of building up a considerable body of political regulation spreading out to policy fields which are of particular interest to citizens such as employment, consumer protection, health and safety, or to areas of high like politics justice, home affairs and foreign relations.

A major strength of the book is that it brings together and discusses the co-existence of the Community method, the Open Method of Coordination and the classical intergovernmental cooperation. This is distinctly important in order for the readers to fully understand how these methods have shaped and induced the patterns of governance over the time. The first one seems to have dominated the policy-making in EU and its forty years of intensive use has made the union overregulated. However, the recent years were in fact the interplay between the last two methods. Starting with the Lisbon Treaty onwards the EU leaders have displayed a propensity towards intergovernmental cooperation. Additionally, the authors strive to explain how the specific policy interests

were mediated by the interchange use of these methods. Another strong point of the book is that it highlights the pre-requisites of sound governance and it underlines the role of system building.

While the authors do a fine job in explaining the patterns and integrating the governance trends into a consistent model for the evolution of the EU system, there are also a few weaknesses of the book. For example, despite a compelling analysis of all the stakeholders involved in the process of change, it is still too little focus on the civil society involvement. Governance implies predominantly a top-down approach but reality has shown that bottom-up processes also should be considered. Unless there is a greater emphasis on the EU citizens, an improvement of policy output and compliance is not possible. Also, the authors are moderate in discussing whether the changes that have occurred during time were in fact beneficial or not. They do not strongly articulate the necessity of a major breakout from the old paradigms of EU governance, which is critical in order to overcome the current economic turmoil.

The discourse of the book is built in a methodical, neat and easy-to-follow style. This work can be appreciated for the selective focus, the accuracy of information as well as for the high-quality analysis and its critical perspective. The effort to gather, blend and use relevant contributions from the literature to support certain ideas did pay off and the outcome is outstanding.

A meaningful finding of the book is that EU has been based on a political and constitutional asymmetry between economic and social policy functions. As it describes the contour of governance and it points out the changes, the book presents a multifaceted Europe passing through different phases over time and adjusting itself in order to cope with the new challenges and circumstances. This work is thought provoking because it reveals a striking reality, that EU is mostly a formal union and less of a community. This supports the idea that a political integration could energize the interaction between the member states and instill trustworthy governance.

Researchers and scholars in international politics, EU integration, constitutional law or even diplomacy could benefit from reading this book. Present trends in EU governance investigations claims that to understand better the gradual metamorphosis of EU governance, the whole process should be assessed in the context of the evolution of regional integration and emergent trends in the member state systems. Although the theories of integration provide some guidance, it is nearly impossible to tell how the policy coordination will affect the future of the European construction. Fusing the perspective of this book with such an idea can lead to further research opportunities.