

Book Review

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European Union Economic Diplomacy: The Role of the EU in External Economic Relations

by Stephen Woolcock

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While economic diplomacy has gained an ever more important role in the international environment, the EU's external action has simultaneously been changing tremendously over time, especially since the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. In the presence of these developments, questions regarding the EU's actorness have also gained more importance. Although these aspects have been lively throughout the academic debate, discussion has been lacking the consideration of specific dimensions of the EU's external action. Therefore this volume contributes to a better comprehension of the EU's economic diplomacy and enriches the scholarly debate crucially by examining the decision-making process and negotiation in external economic policies.

Stephen Woolcock has arranged the volume into seven well-structured chapters. He starts by offering a framework of analysis consisting of three distinct parts that further determine the structure of case studies. The framework analysis comprises a specification of EU decision-making and negotiation practices, an examination of decisive internal and external factors determining the role of the EU in economic diplomacy, and an overview of distinct phases of negotiation processes. The following chapters constitute reflections on case studies based on the framework of analysis previously explained. This ensures a well-rounded insight into four policy areas framing economic diplomacy of the EU.

The case studies that the author has chosen are the EU External Trade and Investment policy-making, financial regulation, EU External Environmental Policy, and EU Development Policy. Each policy area is scrutinised thoroughly, starting by looking at its historical development, examining the inherent decision-making and negotiation processes, and continuing by considering the multiple factors shaping the policy, as well as its effectiveness. Additional example cases that are considered within each policy area fortify the empirical base of the research.

One of the core findings of the book concerns the importance of competences and the crucial role of this concept when evaluating the actorness of the EU. Herein the author points out the basic causal relation that the more competences the EU has, the stronger and more effective it is. Further, an essential part of the volume is the variety of policy areas which are examined throughout. What makes the chosen mixture especially interesting is that the author compares policy areas where the EU has exclusive competence with those where it has shared competence. It is considered vital to distinguish between de facto and de iure competences of the EU, pointing out that in order to evaluate the role of the EU, it is not enough to solely consider the latter.

However, it seems that in certain aspects the diversity of cases tackled makes it difficult to draw general conclusions. For example, one of such questions is in how far is the EU a leader in economic diplomacy. The answer provided by the book is that it depends on the policy area one is considering. Nevertheless, the volume would definitely be appreciated by those who want to acquire a general insight into the EU's role in economic diplomacy, as well as by those who look for more information about a specific policy area.

The book is especially engaging due to its intriguing aim to determine the role of the EU. At the beginning Woolcock points out two options. One could view the EU either as a unified actor in its own right or as a forum for international economic negotiations. Therein it is possible to scrutinise the always present interplay between the EU and member states, which has been well depicted in the four case studies. The author states that the answer to the question regarding the role of the EU lies somewhere in between. It is highly dependent on the policy area in question, and, although the EU has developed as a significant actor in economic diplomacy, the role of member states is undoubted.

The book is structured comprehensively building on three pillars that are based on an underlying question each. The first pillar explains the functioning of the EU economic diplomacy, the second pillar as previously mentioned concerns the determination of the EU's role in economic diplomacy, and the final pillar concerns the preconditions of its effectiveness. Constructed around these three pillars, the analytical framework establishes the realm for the case studies. Beyond that, the clear descriptions of the different aspects of EU economic diplomacy are complemented by numerous tables. This assures that the somewhat complex relationships depicted in this volume are effectively clarified.

A strength of this book is definitely the in-depth explanation of various aspects of EU economic diplomacy. The arguments are well illustrated not only by cases of the four policy areas mentioned above, but going even further into the analysis of specific decision making and negotiation processes in the past. Furthermore, the development and the changes that different treaties have brought to each policy area have been highlighted by offering explanations of different levels of decision making in various EU institutions, which in turn allow full understanding of the path of argumentation.

Woolcock makes a reference to the complicated decision making process in the EU, as well as the inability to understand it, and therefore sets an aim of explaining it. This is a task that he has accomplished with success, as the volume is a valuable source of information about EU economic diplomacy, different actors involved and the decision making, as well as negotiations' process. Moreover, with its in-depth analysis and thorough explanations of the background behind the decision making of EU's economic diplomacy, the book can be appreciated by students new to the topic as well as scholars aiming to acquire a more profound knowledge. What has to be kept in mind when selecting this volume is that, as the author admits himself, the book was written nearing the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Accordingly, not all of the treaty changes were fully obvious at that point and therefore the role of the European External Action Service, among others, is not depicted exhaustively. Despite this aspect, the book provides a fundamental and extensive base for understanding the role of the EU in economic diplomacy as well as the different policies forming economic diplomacy.
