

Editor's Preface

Series editors have basically two tasks: to guarantee the quality of the publications and to guard the topical boundary of the series in order to contribute to a specific discourse. In the latter respect, we receive book proposals, which are squarely within the series topic and proposals, which fall clearly outside the series intention. Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann and Anne van der Vleuten's proposal was difficult to label. Most Regional Integration Organizations are based on intergovernmental agreements and are not immediately and generally recognized as 'non-state actors'. Being convinced about both the intellectual quality of the proposal as well as the methodological and theoretical soundness, the main question was: does the topic fit the subject of our series?

The "confidence" (as Andrea and Anna call it in their preface) we had in the editors and the authors was therefore not related to their quality as researchers as such, but to their ability to position Regional Integration Organizations in the larger discourse on non-state actors. That 'confidence' was based on what Phillip Schmitter explicitly refers to as the 'shared suspicions' of the authors, 'that Trans-National Regional Organizations (TNROs) can –under certain circumstances – become political actors in their *own* right" and that they can "form a *new* type of stable and significant position" (Schmitter pages 6-7 of this publication, italics mine). *Closing or Widening the Gap? Legitimacy and Democracy in Regional Integration Organizations* turns that 'shared suspicion' into a plausible and convincing explanation, based on a variety of empirical evidence, methodological and theoretical approaches;

Adrea Ribeiro Hoffmann and Anna van der Vleuten's have not only co-opted a number of scholars from different disciplines and with different research traditions into the production of an edited volume. They have -more importantly- succeeded into bringing them together on several occasions and guiding the debate(s) on the basis of a set of questions, which inform and connect the author's approaches.

According to Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann en Anne van der Vleuten "[t]here is no easy, general answer to the question [whether] RIOs widen or close the gap between citizens and policy makers" (page 282). "Easy general answer" can only be found if we ask easy and general questions or engage in easy and general debates. The editors and authors of *Closing or Widening the Gap? Legitimacy and Democracy in Regional Integration Organizations* have clearly opted for another approach. They adopted an approach, which closed a part of the disciplinary gap in the study of non-state actors. What probably started as a multidisciplinary enterprise in June 2004 became more and more interdisciplinary as the authors met on several occasions. The end result is a publication that serves and connects the students and practioners of law, politics and governance.

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