

*Book Review*

## European Business Associations Under Stress

*Reviewed by Daniela Schwarzer\**

*Governing Interests. Business associations facing internationalization* edited by Wolfgang Streek, Jürgen R. Grote, Volker Schneider and Jelle Vissier, Routledge, London, 2006, 282 p.

It is not that the academic world lacks publications investigating lobbying and interest group participation. As far back as the 1930s, the study of lobbying activities in the United States led to the first theories of interest groups. Throughout the last century, studies on lobbying in different political systems mushroomed in the US and the EU. For over 20 years now, scholars working on the EU have produced an impressive number of studies on interest groups on the national, supranational and transnational level, of which probably the majority deals with private sector interests.

The volume edited by Streek et al. has nevertheless found a new angle on interest representation. It presents research on the impact

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of internationalization on the organization and representation of business interests through trade and employer associations in a bottom-up perspective. It traces changes of interest groups starting at the national level, in order to understand how the game of interest representation has changed under the conditions of internationalization. Through a number of case studies, the book explores ongoing changes in the structures and functions of business interest associations, focussing almost exclusively on European ones- something which the title of the book does not make clear. Case studies cover several EU countries and different sectors such as the chemical industry, financial sector, etc. Along with this empirical work organised according to “Nation” and “Sector”, as two dimensions of social structure, the book also gathers papers with a more conceptual view of the issue. In a nutshell, the book argues: National business associations and with them the character of interest representation and associative self-governance have been deeply affected by the internationalization of the economy in the last two decades, and of the polity that governs them. National associations have not disappeared, and have not become absorbed by supranational federations or international direct membership associations. As the case studies show, supranational lobbying exists – but is not the only arena for business interest politics. While Streek and Vissier in their conclusions to the volume do not expect the nation state to be replaced by a European supranational state (p. 243), the book presents evidence for declining state capacities at the national level, which are not being recreated at the international one.

One of the branches of lobbying studies in the EU has investigated interest representation as a means to understand the nature of the political system in the European Union (such as its multi-level nature, the role of policy networks etc.). In the same logic, most contributions to *Governing Interests* are as much about interest representation and organisational restructuring of lobbying groups as they are about questions of global or internationalised governance. Discussing the transition of interest representation from a phenomenon confined to the nation state to a global activity automatically brings about questions on the nature of the international order. Studies on lobbying in the EU frequently deduce the importance of supranational or national decision-making centres from the lobbying activities developing around them. What the authors in *Governing*

*Interests* describe as the Internationalization of interest representation does not (exclusively) mean that lobbying seeks other levels and addresses other actors due to the transfer of influence. The empirical papers rather discover new forms of associative order forming a space, part of which is by and large state-free. Interest groups hence re-form in ways and for purposes that differ significantly from previous, national experience.

Through the lens of changing modes of interest representation under the conditions of internationalization, the book offers some hypotheses on the political nature of the international arena in its current state. Regarding the future perspectives for state capacities in a national, supranational or international order, the volume remains (realistically) vague. This book will not only be an interesting read for scholars working on interest representation (and not only on private sector lobbying), but also for scholars studying the fate of the nation state under conditions of economic globalisation and questions of global governance.