To What Extent are International Organizations (IOs) Autonomous Actors in World Politics?[*]

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International Organisations as Non-State Actors in World Politics

The role of International Organisations is becoming increasingly significant and, sometimes, ultimate for international policy-making, the process coming along with the globalisation of world politics. There are 1,963 IOs in the world today and they deal extensively both with global challenges and country-specific issues[1]. The number of IOs is constantly growing, as well as their impact on world matters. The major and most significant IOs are those of the UN system, but there are also key intercontinental and regional organisations. It will be true to say that today the independent behaviour of state actors is becoming more limited because of their obligations to international and regional agreements, regimes and institutions. The reality of growing complex interdependence facilitates a structure of global governance, radically challenging state-centric approaches to international policy-making.

One of the major problems associated with the study of IOs in the IR theory is a lack of coherent approach towards the independent behaviour of IOs in global politics; more attention is traditionally given to their general importance for world affairs and inter-state cooperation, while little attention is given to their policy-making and organisational behaviour, and the transformations they experience because of globalisation and integration processes. As Barnett and Finnemore put it, "…international relations (IR) scholars have not given systematic consideration to how IOs actually behave. Most of our theories are theories of states and state behavior"[2]. Indeed, Realist and Liberal Institutionalist perspectives towards IOs emphasise the importance of states and their rational interests. As Realism suggests, IOs are set up by states, are dependent on them and act for their interests, typically associated with the national security paradigm. "Realists maintain that institutions are basically a reflection of the distribution of power in the world. They are based on the self-interested calculations of the great powers, and they have no independent effect on state behaviour", explains Mearsheimer[3]. The UN Security Council can be normally taken as an example relevant for this approach. Thus, IOs appear as *instruments* for state interests from this perspective. As Mearsheimer compares, "Institutionalists directly challenge this view of institutions, arguing instead that institutions can alter state preferences and therefore change state behavior. Institutions can discourage states from calculating self-interest on the basis of how every move affects their relative power positions"[4]. From the perception of Liberal Institutionalists, IOs function as *arenas* or *forums* for inter-state policy cooperation. It assumes, of course, that states are not the only important actors in world politics, and that security is not the main issue, and that it is the IOs, along with international regimes and agreements, that help to achieve cooperation among nations. However, Liberal Institutionalism remains state-centric and considers that "…international organizations in the contemporary world are not powerful independent actors, and relatively universal organizations such as the United Nations find it

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[1] *Note:* IOs here stand for intergovernmental organisations (IGOs). The data is taken from the *Yearbook of International Organizations 2005-6* of the *Union of International Associations.* This includes: (a) federations; (b) universal membership; (c) intercontinental; (d) regionally oriented; (e) emanating from places, persons, bodies; (f) of special form; (g) internationally oriented. Among them there are 246 conventional ("truly") IGOs of types A-D as defined by UIA in 2005-6. For details on IOs' statistics and typology please see: *www.uia.org/organizations/orgtypes/orgtyped.php#typee* (Available: 20 February 2007).

[2] Michael Barnett, Martha Finnemore, Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. – P. 5.

[3] John Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions", International Security 19 (3), 1994/5. – P. 7.

[4] Ibid. – P. 7.

extraordinarily difficult to reach agreement on significant issues" (Keohane, Nye)[5].

However, though looking at IOs differently, both Realism and Liberal Institutionalism perspectives are based on the understanding of IOs as intergovernmental actors, i.e. actors who cooperate because of shared interests of national governments, thus not being free in their decision-making. The principle of *intergovernmentalism* suggests that decision-making is unanimous and dependent on states, that power is exercised by states, and that the role of international bureaucracy is functional. As Cronin says, "as an intergovernmental institution, the UN reflects the overlapping interests of member states, particularly those of the Security Council. Major initiatives and policies are promoted by accredited delegations, all of whom represent their governments"[6]. *Transnationalism* (or transgovernmentalism) is the other principle of IOs' decision-making based on the idea of transcending national interests, on the majority principle, where power is exercised by independent international officials through their own *delegated and acquired authority*. As Cronin explains, "as a transnational organization, however, the UN also often represents a common good that transcends the sum of individual state interests. Such concerns are promoted by… the UN's specialized agencies, affiliated organizations, bureaucracy and office of the secretary-general"[7]. Transnational decision-making principles are typical for humanitarian and development agencies, international law and human rights organisations (e.g. UNDP, WFP, UNAIDS, ICJ etc.). Cronin claims that there is a tension between intergovernmentalism and transnationalism within the UN, arguing that this conflict "reflects a similar tension within the international system itself"[8].

If we try to look at policy-making behaviour of IOs, we will be able to see that IOs do act autonomously to a considerable level and that they have quite independent effects on the international system; and that state-centric approaches are not that relevant. As Reinalda and Veerbeek put it, "many international organizations have clearly succeeded in formulating, and sometimes implementing, policies that cannot be described as the simple product of interstate bargaining…"[9]. In contemporary world politics IOs deal not only with such universal challenges as global warming or HIV/AIDS, uniting efforts of states to respond to them, but also with many other issues, which have been considered state matters, and IOs affect interests of states in such areas as healthcare, financial policies, electoral processes or other domestic issues. As Barnett and Finnemore explain, "they make authoritative decisions that reach every corner of the globe and affect areas as public as governmental spending and as private as reproductive rights"[10].

IOs may act as national administrations, implement governmental tasks and even promote, establish and develop new states (e.g. UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste, UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara). IOs pose sanctions on states, transform their economies and financial systems, and change their political and institutional landscapes (e.g. UN Security Council, WTO, IMF, UNDP, IBRD, EBRD). It is true that such activities may reflect certain states' interests, but at the same time these activities largely represent IOs' interests, and IOs act as agents of change and socialisation (e.g. Council of Europe, OSCE in Eastern Europe). States may be interested in some level of IOs' autonomy for their goals to be reached, but once created IOs tend to act on their own above the level of functional or operational decisions. As Reinalda and Veerbeek argue, "it appears that sub-national and trans-national organized interests have become influential actors in politics and are noticeably active on their own or by means of collective action through a number of existing and rapidly emerging international organizations"[11]. Even Cox and Jacobson argued in 1973 from a functionalist perspective that IOs staff members either individually or collectively "are usually most influential in operational decisions, but

[5] Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye. Transgovernmental Relations and International Organizations. World Politics, Vol. 27, No. 1. Oct., 1974. – P. 39.
[6] Bruce Cronin, "The Two Faces of the United Nations: The Tension Between Intergovernmentalism and Transnationalism," Global Governance 8 (1) Jan – March 2002. – P. 53.
[7] Ibid. – P. 53.
[8] Ibid. – P. 53.

[9] Bob Reinalda, Bertjan Verbeek (eds), Autonomous policy-making by international organizations. London; New York: Routledge , 1998. – P. 3.
[10] Michael Barnett, Martha Finnemore. Op. Cit. – P. 3.
[11] Bob Reinalda, Bertjan Verbeek. Op. Cit. – P. 3.

they may also be influential in other types of decisions", and that sometimes they "act quite independently"[12]. However, most importantly, IOs' activities today are substantially of *normative origin* because IOs create and implement rules, set their own agendas, and construct social norms based on their knowledge and expertise. According to Barnett and Finnemore, IOs use rules "not only to regulate but also to constitute and construct the social world"[13].

IOs, therefore, act with their own authority, which make them influence world politics autonomously. As Haftel and Thompson put it, "the independence of an institution largely determines its authority and influence – in short, its ability to shape international politics"[14]. Thus, we can consider IOs as *bureaucracies* with their own logics, norms, and interests, enabling one to look at them as *independent non-state actors*. As Barnett and Finnemore claim, "the rational-legal authority that IOs embody gives them power independent of the states that created them and channels that power in particular directions"[15]. Abbott and Snidal argue, "IOs can become autonomous sites of authority because their bureaucracies possess legitimate authority and control over expertise"[16]. Since IOs are becoming more influential, they have more authority and, therefore, autonomy. Consequently, if there is a higher level of authority of IOs in world politics today, they enjoy a considerable level of their autonomy.

Thus, the Social Constructivist perspective provides the most adequate and relevant approach towards IOs as non-state autonomous actors in world politics. The role of IOs in international policy-making is growing, as well as their influence. IOs are becoming more independent and act as bureaucracies with their own authority, rules, norms, values and agendas. IOs are to a large extent autonomous in world politics, which is illustrated below.

Beyond Intergovernmentalism: UNMIK and OSCE

IOs are able to formulate and implement policies based on their norms, rules and expert knowledge. IOs act above the level of intergovernmental cooperation and may actually affect not only interests but also sovereignty of states; they may govern states, assign new norms and values to them, and create new states. I would like to illustrate this type of IOs' policy-making on the examples of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)[17] and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, empirically evaluating the level of autonomy of these IOs[18].

The UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

UNMIK was created in 1999 according to the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, following the Kosovo crisis in 1998-9. The document demands that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) withdraws its entire police and military presence from the province of Kosovo, and sets the synchronic deployment of international security presence in the region. Most importantly, Resolution 1244 authorizes establishment of an interim civilian administration in Kosovo so that the region could "enjoy substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia"[19]. According to the decision, the UN Mission in Kosovo[20] should perform basic civilian

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[12] Robert W. Cox, Harold K. Jacobson. The Anatomy of Influence. Decision Making in International Organizations. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1973. – P. 399.

[13] Michael Barnett, Martha Finnemore. Op. Cit. – P. 6.

[14] Yoram Z. Haftel, Alexander Thompson, "The Independence of International Organizations: Concept and Applications", Journal of Conflict Resolution 2006; 50. – P. 253.

[15] Michael Barnett, Martha Finnemore, "The Politics, Power and Pathologies of International Organizations," *International Organization* 53 (4), Autumn 1999. – P. 699.

[16] Kenneth W. Abbott, Duncan Snidal. Why states act through formal international organizations. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4, 1998. – P. 5.

[17] *Note:* the OSCE Mission in Kosovo is an integral part of UNMIK.

[18] ***Note:*** There are many examples of different types of this or that IOs autonomous behaviour, for example, in global trade or financial policies (WTO, IMF, World Bank), or in humanitarian and relief policies (UNHCHR, WFP), or in public health (WHO, UNAIDS), but I purposefully take these more political examples to illustrate how not only interests but also state system and sovereignty are affected by IOs activity.

[19] UNSC Resolution 1244, 10 June 1999. http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/7957814.html (Available: 21 Feb. 2006).

[20] The information provided is based on the data from the official web site of UNMIK at: www.unmikonline.org/civiladm/index.html (Available: 21 Feb. 2006) and other official web sources for Kosovo.

administrative functions, promote the establishment of self-government in Kosovo, facilitate a political process to determine Kosovo's future status, coordinate the work of international agencies, support the reconstruction of key infrastructure, maintain civil law and order, promote human rights, and assure safe return of refugees back to Kosovo.

UNMIK administers the affairs of Kosovo, dealing with such normally domestic issues as healthcare, education, finance etc. Its operational framework is based on four "pillars": police and justice (UN administered), civil administration (UN administered), democratisation and institution building (OSCE administered), reconstruction and economic development (EU administered)[21]. The Head of UNMIK is the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General. UNMIK established in Kosovo the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government: the Assembly, the Government[22], the Judicial System[23]. NATO provides the international security force (KFOR). Numerous UN agencies have their missions in Kosovo (UNDP, FAO, IMF, WHO etc.). In fact, the UN established a new system of governance for Kosovo, thus making it a new autonomous state-level unit since it has been made "substantially autonomous"[24] from the FRY (now from the Republic of Serbia).

UNMIK consists of bodies, departments and units, and clearly represents an international bureaucracy (with its hierarchy, rules, norms and authority) that governs the region[25]. As Haftel and Thompson indicate, "The existence of a supranational bureaucracy, typically embodied in a secretariat or a commission, is an important sign of IO independence... . We capture variation in supranational bureaucracy independence with two indicators: the existence of a distinct secretariat or its equivalent and the authority of this body to initiate policy"[26]. From this very example, we can see that UNMIK have an extensive bureaucratic structure, which has very large authority for policy initiation. For example, UNMIK started issuing its own travel documents for Kosovo inhabitants, and currently 39 states recognize it[27]. It illustrates a very high level of UNMIK autonomy as a non-state actor. Reinalda and Veerbeek argue that IOs' "degree of autonomy increases strongly when states not only allow certain topics to be put on agendas... but also accept, and participate in, the implementation of such policies"[28].

The UN is engaged in "state-building" of Kosovo as, in fact, an independent state. Recently, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, presented the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, which is to be adopted by the UN Security Council. According to it, "Kosovo shall be a multi-ethnic society, governing itself democratically and with full respect for the rule of law, the highest level of internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, and which promotes the peaceful and prosperous existence of all its inhabitants"[29]. The Proposal suggests that Kosovo should have its own constitution (and defines its principal elements), have its own symbols, be able to enter international organisations, set the model of governance. The Proposal promotes the establishment of the International Civilian Representative (the EU Special Representative) appointed by the International Steering Group, who will have "supervisory authority" and will be able to "annul decisions or laws adopted by Kosovo authorities and sanction or remove public officials whose actions are determined by the ICR to be inconsistent with the letter or spirit of the

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[21] Note: Before 2000 there was one more "pillar" for humanitarian assistance administered by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, but it was later phased out.

[22] Note: The Prime Minister is nominated by the President and confirmed by the Assembly.

[23] Note: Members are proposed by the Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, then confirmed by the Assembly, and appointed by the Head of UNMIK.

[24] Note: Resolution 1244 gives quite a vague notion of "substantial autonomy". As O'Neill explains, "No one knew what "substantial autonomy" and "meaningful self-determination really meant… Although the Security Council never used the word, what it had created was a modern trusteeship" (William G. O'Neill. Kosovo: An Unfinished Peace. London, 2002. – P. 30-31).

[25] For more details on UNMIK structure please see: www.unmikonline.org/departments.htm (Available:21Feb.2006)

[26] Yoram Z. Haftel, Alexander Thompson. Op. Cit. – P. 256.

[27] Please see: UNMIK. Kosovo in 2006, www.unmikonline.org/docs/2006/Fact_Sheet_Oct_2006.pdf (Available: 21Feb.2006) - P. 8.

[28] Bob Reinalda, Bertjan Verbeek. Op. Cit. – P. 3.

[29] For details please see: UN Office of the Special Envoy for Kosovo (UNOSEK): The Status Proposal, Executive Summary. www.unosek.org (Available: 21 Feb. 2006)

Settlement"[30]; the Proposal grants the ICR with the status of final authority in civil matters, whose mandate will continue till the ISG determines that Kosovo has implemented the terms of the Settlement. The document prescribes that European Security and Defence Policy Mission (ESDP) and International Military Presence (NATO) will also work in Kosovo. The Settlement is supposed to take precedence over all other Kosovo's legal provisions. This initiative is actually a drafted constitution and the creation of a new state out of Serbian sovereignty.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

The OSCE has had a mandate for its mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) under the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP) that was reached in Dayton (Ohio, USA) and later signed in Paris in 1995 to stop the Bosnian War[31]. This document with further sub-agreements mandated OSCE to take responsibility for tasks on elections, human rights, military stabilization and later "democracy-building"[32].

OSCE has been involved in a broad range of "state-building" activities in BIH. OSCE aims "to encourage the development of democracy by establishing professional and transparent political practices and supporting the growth of democratic government institutions discharging their responsibility effectively in an open and transparent manner"[33]. In this respect, OSCE implements a series of initiatives and projects aimed at public administration reform, building a new governance system. It has organised, conducted and supervised elections, and established the Provisional Election Commission for BIH. OSCE monitors the work of legal and human rights institutions, it has appointed the Human Rights Ombudsman as an international civil servant who reports to the mission. OSCE actually shapes the country's security policy; it is engaged in security monitoring, arms control, and policy coordination with the military of BIH, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro.

The OSCE acts with its own authority, which is gained from the Dayton Agreement, and with its expertise in the field. OSCE, being mandated, enjoys a very high level of autonomy in its policies and tends to expand its mission (for example, the "democracy-building" task was added in its agenda later after other goals). Debating over the OSCE's elections policy, Cousens and Cater argue, "not only did OSCE mission in Bosnia try use what power it had been given through the Provisional Election Commission, it arguably exercised powers it was never even given, such as when the PEC overruled and EASC decision immediately prior to the 1996 elections. The roles played by OHR and OSCE, particularly when combined with the wide range of international involvement in other arenas of the Bosnian polity and economy, make a heavy 'footprint' indeed of international engagement in the country"[34]. The OSCE Mission in BIH has an extensive international bureaucracy with four departments, regional centres and personnel. OSCE is regulated by its own policy documents and rules; since its tasks are mandated, it then implements them with its own norms and principles.

As the UN does in Kosovo, OSCE in BIH sets policy agendas and embodies normative values such as human rights, rule of law, transparency, democracy and good governance, thus socialising the country within the international system. It acts as an actor of change. OSCE in BIH doesn't perform just an assistant role but constructs new norms and values with the initiation of new policies and creation of new rules for the country. It shows a very high level of OSCE's autonomy, even if its tasks are delegated, because OSCE is a non-state actor directly affecting the state's system. Haftel and Thompson consider

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[30] Ibid. – www.unosek.org (Available: 21 Feb. 2006)

[31] For details please see: The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. www.oscebih.org/overview/gfap/eng/default.asp (Available: 21 Feb. 2006)

[32] The OSCE is a part of the extensive international governance structure (Board of Principals) working in BIH under the Dayton Agreement. This essay for its purposes focuses only on the policy-making by OSCE. The Board is the coordinating structure, which also consists of: the Office of High Representative (the EU Special Representative), NATO Mission, EU Force, UNHCR, EU Police Mission, and the European Commission. The World Bank, the IMF and the UNDP work closely with the Board. For details please see: www.ohr.int/board-of-princip/default.asp?content_id=27551 (Available: 21 Feb. 2006)

[33] OSCE in BIH, www.oscebih.org/overview/programmes.asp?d=7 (Available: 21 Feb. 2006)

[34] Elizabeth M. Cousens, Charles K. Cater. Toward Peace in Bosnia. Implementing the Dayton Accords. London, 2001. – P. 132.

"the power to initiate and recommend as an important source of independence"[35]. Thus, OSCE is very autonomous in its policy-making in BIH. Moreover, by these activities OSCE promotes its organisational goals and agendas, enhancing its authority and, consequently, getting more autonomy.

Conclusion

IOs' role and influence in world politics is growing. They produce systemic effects on the international system with their policy-making independent of states' interests, though interests of some states and IOs may overlap. A priori, criticism on IOs' *autonomy* is mostly based on the assumptions that IOs are intergovernmental in nature and cannot act independently [36]. However, IOs' policy-making behaviour shows that IOs can work transnationally, above the level of inter-state cooperation, and produce independent effects. IOs are enabled by states, but then they tend to act on their own. IOs are international bureaucracies with their internal norms, rules and interests. IOs' policy-making has an essential normative dimension: IOs construct social norms and values, create their agendas and implement policies based on their knowledge and expertise. IOs have their own authority, which make them act autonomously. IOs' autonomous behaviour deals with a broad range of policy areas (trade, finance, health etc.) and they affect interests of states because of their independent policy-making. However, IOs can affect not only interests of states in these areas, but also state system and sovereignty. IOs may construct new norms and values for states, restructure them, and even create new ones. The incorporated examples of UNMIK and OSCE show the very high level of these IOs' autonomy in policy-making and the ability to promote their agendas. IOs' ability to initiate policies and get support for them from states also shows a very high level of their autonomy as non-state actors. I conclude that IOs are to a large extent autonomous in world politics.

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[35] Yoram Z. Haftel, Alexander Thompson. Op. Cit. – P. 261.

[36] There is another dimension of IOs criticism, associated with their legitimacy and accountability as many IOs may be considered as the product of Western civilisation, which makes them undemocratic in nature. However, the focus and the limits of this essay make this discussion principally concentrated on the issues of autonomy.

List of Acronyms

BIH – Bosnia and Herzegovina
EBRD – European Bank of Reconstruction and Development
EU – European Union
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
HIV/AIDS – Human immunodeficiency virus/ Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICJ – International Courts of Justice
IBRD – International Bank of Reconstruction and Development
IMF – International Monetary Fund
KFOR – NATO Kosovo Force
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UNAIDS – The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNHCHR – United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK – United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNOSEK - United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Kosovo
UNSC – United Nations Security Council
WHO – World Health Organisation
WTO – World Trade Organisation

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