



Sophie Meunier, *Trading Voices: The European Union in International Commercial Negotiations* Princeton, Princeton University Press 2005

This interesting book sets out to question the received academic wisdoms that either European integration exerts no substantive impact on member states but, rather, is simply a forum for member state negotiations, or that negotiating with a 'single voice' creates external strength for the Union. It also challenges a third view, common amongst many of those involved in the making of EU commercial policy, that EU policy making in this sector is inefficient and ineffective.

Building upon four detailed case studies of EU-US trade negotiations, the author makes the case that the effectiveness of the EU in international trade negotiations is a function both of its decision-making structures and of the context of the negotiations in question. In a 'conservative' negotiating context – i.e. when the Union is anxious to preserve the status quo – unanimity and a lack of autonomy for the Commission from the member states actually renders the Union more able to achieve its objectives. In contrast, when the Union wants to shift the status quo, a higher degree of 'supranational competence' (majority voting in the Council and a degree of negotiating latitude accorded to the Commission) lead to greater effectiveness.

Certainly, the book suffers from some minor shortcomings. The empirical evidence for supranational competence presented in the chapter on public procurement is a little thin. Moreover, it might have been useful had the author picked the notion of supranational competence apart a little, distinguishing, insofar as is possible, between the impact of QMV and Commission negotiating autonomy.

All that being said, the book makes a real contribution to our thinking on what is obviously a highly topical and important aspect of EU action. By challenging simple claims and assumptions regarding the costs and benefits of 'unity', it compels us, as we should, to think in more nuanced ways about the EU and its workings.

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