In this book, Mats Braun aims to offer an up-to-date account of how post-communist member states have handled policy initiatives in the field of environmental policy after accession. Case studies on Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania explore whether social norms and the process of socialization can help us understand why the track record of new member states in the area of environmental policy is more varied than was originally envisaged prior to enlargement. Sebastian Mayr recommends this book to students looking for an overview of the topic.

Europeanization of Environmental Policy in the New Europe. Mats Braun. Ashgate. 2014.

Find this book:
correspondence between norms promoted by the EU and the activities of domestic norm entrepreneurs, such as NGOs. A condition for socialization via the first road would be, for example, the continuous involvement of the same people and the same institutions in a particular policy, whereas norm diffusion via the second road would normally go along with dominant action of NGOs, industries or other advocacy groups in favour of the EU policy.

After elaborating on the EU’s environmental core norms – namely ecological modernization, sustainable development, precautionary principle, multilateralism and environmental policy integration – the author uses Chapter 4 to discuss the performance of new and old member states in terms of transposition and implementation of EU environmental policy directives as well as public opinion. He concludes that the infringement and transposition statistics do not reveal any significant differences between CEECs and the EU-15 member states or change over time but rather, if at all, confirm the divide between Northern and Southern European countries (p.57). In contrast to this, Eurobarometer and Gallup surveys suggest that the CEECs have different normative preferences on EU environmental policies such as climate policy and show lower support for environmental protection in general.

In Chapter 6, “The New Member States and EU Climate Policy”, Braun then analyses how likely the socialization process proceeds in the selected countries with regard to the EU climate change policy of 2008/2009, and provides a background on the latter. For his analysis Braun draws on 44 semi-structured interviews with agents, representatives and activists involved in the formation of the CEEC’s negotiation positions in the two EU policies under examination (p.23). He concludes that “there are few indications of socialization in the field” (p. 146), with biggest obstacles in Poland. Poland stands out due to “almost consensual support among the political elite for an alternative norm”, while norm opponents are strong and norm entrepreneurs marginalized (p. 146). Bulgaria and Romania are reluctant to challenge the EU climate norms, which may not be due to an on-going socialization but rather the countries’ short history of EU membership. In contrast, “indications of socialization of EU climate norms” can be found for the Czech Republic, which is supposedly due to its influential Ministry of Environment and a “certain stability of staff of the Ministry” (p.147).

In his concluding discussion, Braun summarizes the results of the analysis of both policy cases as well as the respective role and reception of the five EU environmental core norms reflected in the two policy cases. He concludes that “whereas the conditions for the first road of socialization are largely in place regarding the REACH regulation and EU chemical policy, this is not the case regarding climate change policy due to the high level of
fluctuation of staff working on this issue in the public administrations” (p. 157). Regarding the second road to socialization, he only finds indications of an ongoing socialization process in the Czech Republic and only on climate change policies. As a consequence of his analysis, Braun argues that CEECs become increasingly willing to challenge the EU position and that the EU enlargement may eventually hamper future EU environmental policy. Nevertheless, “socialization should not be equated to a certain type of state behaviour” and it is not likely that CEECs will form blocking minorities in the Council due to different approaches taken towards the EU (p.158), he states.

In sum, Europeanization of Environmental Policy in the New Europe provides interesting case studies on the policy approaches of four CEECs towards the EU’s REACH legislation and climate policy package 2008/9, based on rich qualitative data. By analysing CEECs’ positions after their adoption of the environmental acquis communautaire, he contributes to a new field of research and a new stream of the EU normative power literature. While the book’s strength lies in the judicious discussion and balancing of arguments and evidence, the value of its conclusions remains questionable. As it relies on only two policy cases and barely half of all new recent EU member states, any conclusions must be put into perspective and seen as “tentative”, as Braun admits himself. The book thus addresses itself mainly to academic peers interested in evidence on and understanding of the presented cases and further research on the topic.

Sebastian Mayr is an LSE alumnus of International Political Economy 2006. He is currently a teaching assistant at Science Po Paris, in the Master Programme International Energy. He is a review editor for the Journal Frontiers in Energy Research. Read more reviews by Sebastian.

♦ Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books