



Andrea Cofelice (2019). *Parliamentary Institutions in Regional and International Governance. Functions and Powers*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2019, 210 pp.

Giovanni Finizio

One of the most important novelties of the last decades concerning the international organization (IO) process is its parliamentarization, which has its most advanced example in the European Parliament. Although the first Inter-Parliamentary Institution (IPI) – the Inter-Parliamentary Union – was established as early as 1889, the proliferation of IPIs within or outside official regional international organizations (RIOs) accelerated dramatically since the 1990s.

Literature is increasingly recognizing the importance of this phenomenon, which however still remains amongst the most neglected in the study of international relations, especially considering the extensive literature on regionalism available today.

This book by Andrea Cofelice contributes to filling this gap, providing a comprehensive analysis of 22 IPIs from European, African and Latin American RIOs. In particular, it aims at describing, assessing and explaining the empowerment of these institutions, which are very heterogeneous in terms of competences, composition and roles.

After a critical review of the literature on parliamentary empowerment and a presentation of the theoretical argument aimed at explaining it, drawing upon new institutionalism and comparative regionalism approaches (chapter 1), the central part of the book discusses and assesses IPIs' institutional features, powers and functions. While chapter 2 is aimed at explaining how they are established, organized and legitimized, chapter 3 deals with the implementation of the main functions of such institutions – consultative, oversight, appointment, legislative and budgetary – in order to assess the degree of influence that they are able to exert over RIOs' decision-making process. Finally, chapter 4 is devoted to the identification of the structural conditions and the causal mechanisms that may favour or hamper IPIs' empowerment.

Two methodological choices made by the author represent an added value to this book. The first one is the comparative approach, i.e. the most successful option to grasp a world-wide phenomenon which on the one hand is fuelled by global and "systemic" factors, and on the other includes the development of very heterogeneous institutions, driven by specific domestic (national and regional) factors. Furthermore, this approach makes it possible to overcome Eurocentrism affecting most of the literature on this topic, which is caused by the fact that the European Union, together with the European Parliament, is the most advanced laboratory of supranational

democracy in the world. The second choice is the combination of a theoretical and empirical analysis, which allows the author to go much beyond the formal provisions of official documents, in order to assess and measure the effective powers of these institutions in the framework of their respective organizations through a specific “parliamentary power index”.

Since the 1990s the promise of “people-centredness” and “people-drivenness” has been increasingly included, more or less explicitly, among the fundamental principles and objectives of many RIOs. To a variable extent, a rhetoric-reality gap affects most of them in this respect, however. Through this thorough study of IPIs functions and powers, Andrea Cofelice provides a valuable contribution to the scientific debate on the assessment of IOs’ democratic features, which attracts growing interest among scholars in various disciplines.