



**International
Relations
PhD Program**

SUMMARY OF THESIS

András Szörényi

**The increasing influence of non state actors in different areas
of international relations**

Ph.D. dissertation

Advisor:

Jenő Horváth, Dr. habil.

university professor

Budapest, 2013

Department of World Economy

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1. Research questions and justification of the topic

Non state actors have become more dominant in the international arena of advocacy in the last decades. Following the 17th and 18th centuries when the most significant change was the emergence of the Nation State as well as the 19th and 20th centuries when the different international organizations gained territory, the 21st century will most probably be the century of the increasing transnational activity and influence of non state actors.

Already after World War II more attention was paid to transnational relations and to the non state actors that participated in these relations. Only a few analyses were conducted in the 1960s and it remained moderate till the end of the 20th century. (Risse-Kappen 1995) The economic recovery after World War II and the completion of the capitalist economic order made the influence of these “new” actors stronger. (Josselin – Wallace 2001) In fact, the actors are not new rather the international or transnational way they act as well as the networking they use. Looking more closely it seems that transnational non state actors have gained the most influence.

The research has focused on the following hypotheses:

- A) In the 21st century due to the increase of the number and influence of non state actors the state-dominance of the international system seems to evaporate, therefore instead of the inter-state relations the transnational relations become dominant.*
- B) The reconfiguration of the political sphere and the transformation of power add up to the forming of a “new medievalism”, where power is shared by many actors.*
- C) Due to the increase of the number and capabilities of non state actors a power-transfer is happening from states to non state actors. Non state actors therefore become the competitors of the states.*

2. Structure and applied methodology

In order to prove the hypotheses I followed the below structure. First I analyzed the characteristics of the international system, using a deductive approach, and then I made qualitative and quantitative analysis of the activity of non state actors. In the second chapter I defined the notions to be applied. Third, after analyzing the relevant theoretical schools I chose the most relevant one. I paid attention to the ever-changing nature of the international system, especially to the modification of the power-mix. In the fourth chapter I studied the systemic causes of the change of the influence of non state actors as well as the evolution of their capabilities. The fifth chapter highlighted the different interactions non state actors make with other actors of international relations and the change in time. The next chapter focused on the evolution of the characteristics of non state actors. It emphasized the attributes that make them capable of playing a more important role in transnational relations. The seventh chapter summarized the results of the quantitative analysis of the trends regarding the number of non state actors and their interactions.

2.1.Theoretical framework

The Westphalian system was a state-centered, sovereignty-based international system where the interactions of the dominant actors – the states – were best described by the realist theory. The gradual shift of influence from states to non state actors has started after World War II. According to Horváth „the global problems of the world – already present in the reports of the Club of Rome in the 1970s – have become more and more worrisome and threatening: above all due to the degradation of the natural environment, deforestation, pollution of waters, emission of green-house gases and the population boom.” (Horváth 2007, p. 14) The analysis of these trends in the 1970s questioned the dominance of the state-centric world order and put the transnational non state actors in the focus of analyses. Most of the approaches however remained within the framework of the neorealist-neoliberal institutional discussion and concentrated on the international organizations. (Czempiel 1969, Kaiser 1969, Keohane – Nye 1972, Rosenau 1980)

In the 1990s a new wave of study of the activities of non state actors in the international system appeared. But the question to answer has changed: how states and non state actors influence each other in the international or transnational system, and which one becomes dominant. (Risse-Kappen 1995, Cerny 1995, Held 1995)

2.2. Transnational relations 2.0

Although realist/neorealist and liberal/neoliberal theories cannot be neglected, the best starting point to analyze the place and influence of non state actors within the international system seems to be the transnational approach. Based on the neoliberal theory new transnational approaches like those of Mathews, Risse-Kappen or Slaughter gain more and more attention. These scholars question the state-centric view of international relations. They do not certainly dispute the existence and role of the states in the system rather expand their analysis to transnational interactions where at least one party is a non state actor. In these relations the exchange happens between a state and a non state actor or between two non state actors. Several authors discuss the “post-Westphalian” or “post-national constellation” or the emergence of a “global society”. (Kiss J. 2003, p. 33) The increase of the number of relations above, below or parallel to the states is rooted in the development of communication technology, decrease of communication costs, development of international travel and globalization of financial networks. The definition of transnational relations can be described as follows: Relations crossing state borders where at least one of the parties is a non state actor.

Applying the constructivist approach Thomas Risse-Kappen draws the most balanced conclusion by saying that “the “state world” and the “society world” need each other.” (Risse-Kappen 1995, p. 310)

The “New Medievalism” theory of Mathews studies the actors of the international system and concludes that the new international challenges will be met most efficiently not by the states but rather by non state actors that act above, below or parallel to the states. (Mathews 1997) Non state actors become more apt to face global and transnational challenges.

Slaughter in her transgovernmental approach does not deny the existence of the states either, but emphasizes the role of non state actors. Governing remains in state hands, however several sub-entities of the government become independent actors within the international relations. (Slaughter 1997)

2.3. Quantitative analysis

The evolution of the influence of non state actors arises from three major factors. First, the number of these actors and their interactions with others has been increasing. Second, their capabilities of advocacy have become stronger. Third, their relative strength has increased

due to the shifts in the international system. A higher frequency of interaction – most probably while not definitely – triggers bigger impact on the conduct of other actors. In order to be able to measure the trend of the overall impact I used a simplified representative method. I quantified the number of mentions of non state actors in the literature, while assumed that the mentions reflect events with measurable impact. Data compressed by decade show a clear trend from 22 mentions (1951-60) to 1005 (2011-2020 projection); almost 50 times higher. The trend has an even pace with two periods of higher increase: the 1980s and the 2000s. From 2011 the mentions of non state actors has surpassed the mentions of non-governmental organizations. The increasing number of publications about the impact of non state actors reflects their growing activity and confirms that their interactions and influence in the transnational relations have been increased.

3. Summary of the findings

The presence and strengthening of non state actors can be observed primarily in two areas. On the one hand they fill in the vacuum the states cannot or do not seek to fill in – be it economic, social or security related. On the other hand they appear in areas above the level of state interaction in the transnational sphere. Classic examples are the transnational economic opportunities stemming from globalization or the global environmental challenges.

3.1.Coercion of adaptation

States face new types of challenges due to the termination of the bipolar military confrontation, the emergence of transnational problems, the globalization of world economy, the increase of influence of transnational corporations and the revolution in communication technology. The importance of hard and soft power elements shifts as a result of new challenges and stronger challengers. This trend indirectly also means that the relative power of the states changes while their tools of advocacy remain the same. As a consequence of globalization economic relations alter constantly, beyond economic sanctions and development aid the attracting, stable economic environment and the investment climate gain increasing importance. These soft power elements show how the possession of such power elements can alter the relative power of several actors – in that particular case the non state actors – compared to others, such as the states.

The activity of interest promotion on behalf of non state actors is directed towards three separate groups of transnational actors: states, international organizations and other non state actors (mostly economic players). The influence can be direct or indirect. While advocacy remains an indirect way of influencing the processes through other actors, the capability of direct power in the transnational relations opens up a new chapter of opportunities for the non state actors. This is the novelty of the 21st century regarding the room for maneuver of non state actors.

3.2.The capability of influence of non state actors

The analysis started from the theory of transnational relations and used the notion of power as the central element of interactions defined by Keohane and Nye. The capability of influence

of all international and transnational actors is composed of the same elements: military power, economic power and soft power. Both states and non state actors possess these elements but at different partition. States have historically bigger military power, while non state actors usually possess more soft power. However in the last two decades two very important changes have occurred. On the one hand non state actors have gained more economic and military power in absolute terms. On the other hand the relative weight of the power elements has changed in the power mix. Studying the change of capabilities of non state actors I used the theory of “new medievalism” of Mathews. The emerging challenges of the 21st century require different capabilities and valorize economic and soft power in conflict resolution that gives non state actors the upper hand. Nevertheless taking into account all power elements non state actors have not yet become dominant in all fields.

When analyzing the relations among the different actors of the transnational system – cooperative, competitive or confrontational – I applied the analytical framework of Risse-Kappen and Slaughter. I consider it as a significant change that while earlier non state actors followed dominantly cooperative strategy towards the states (human rights, environment protection, regulations) they become active in more areas where competitive or confrontational strategy is required (economic interests, monopoly of violence). This is because the importance of areas is changing and the relative shift of capability of non state actors creates the possibility of active engagement in those areas. Non state actors undertake steps that result in competitive or confrontational situations with the traditionally dominant states.

3.2.1. The dominance of states does not vanish

Hypothesis ‘A’ assumed that in the 21st century due to the increasing number and influence of non state actors the state dominance of the international system will vanish, transnational relations will dominate the international relations.

The analysis of the characteristics of the international political and economic system in the beginning of the 21st century confirmed that the effects of globalization, global challenges and the difficulties of states facing these challenges provide new opportunities for the non state actors. The relevance of transnational relations will further increase. I studied in detail the distinction between international and transnational relations as well as the phenomenon how international politics becomes domestic and domestic becomes international.

Hypothesis ‘A’ was confuted. The dominance of states in the entire international system did not cease, but decreased at different areas. The extent of decrease varies while the influence

of non state actors has not become exclusive at any given area. The activity of non state actors may become dominant in areas where transnational relations play an important role. Transnational relations and transnational networks grow constantly, economic power and soft power gain importance meanwhile interstate relations remain integral part of the international relations.

3.2.2. In the “new medieval” power is shared

According to hypothesis ‘B’ the rearrangement of the political sphere and the transformation of the characteristics of power create a new medieval structure where power is shared by several actors. The analysis has proved that the extension of state functions, the vacuum created by the lack of state activity, as well as the appearance and strengthening of non state actors willing to fill in the vacuum rearranged the relations at the national and transnational level.

The increase of the number of actors and the share of power are most visible in the economic sphere where the competitive and the confrontational approaches are dominant. Due to the characteristics of the globalised markets and primarily the operational mechanism of financial markets non state actors have become capable of influencing the states directly and indirectly through other non state actors that multiplies the original effect. As for the area of military power some modification is also tangible due to the easier access to technology and the increasing economic means of financing military capacities. Several non state actors possessing the capacity of using violence reached the level of being capable of acting instead of or against the states. Their number is still relatively low therefore they do not reach the critical mass that would question the dominance of states in this field.

The study of the form and level of interaction between non state actors and other actors concluded that different approaches can be used effectively for advocacy towards states, influencing international organizations or shaping relations with other non state actors. It became evident in all cases that multiplied indirect influence is used at an increasing manner. Hypothesis ‘B’ is confirmed. In the resolution of new types of conflicts the shift of the relative weight of the power-mix elements and the possession of new types of power by non state actors strengthen the overall position of the non state actors. Therefore the relationship between states and non state actors at the level of transnational relations has changed. The position of non state actors has been solidified.

3.2.3. Power transfer from states to non state actors is happening

Hypothesis ‘C’ stated that due to the increasing number and capabilities of non state actors a power transfer from states to non state actors is happening that makes non state actors the rivals of states. It can be traced in the strengthening of capacity of influence or the growing number of interactions. The study has proved that non state actors are able to act as rivals in certain areas – e.g. economic regulations, monopoly of violence – often confronting the states. In other areas cooperation remains the dominant strategy. In the future the number of areas where the influence of non state actors increases may show further growth.

The conclusion above was confirmed by the quantitative analysis in the last chapter that validated the growth of number and activity of non state actors. Although this methodology does not quantify in absolute terms the effect of non state actors it proves indirectly that the room for maneuver and capacity of influence of non state actors increase. The quantitative results confirmed the analytical conclusions. Hypothesis ‘C’ is partially confirmed. The power transfer from states to non state actors is happening, but it enables non state actors to become rivals of states only at selected fields while power relations remain unchanged in other areas.

3.3. Conclusion

The study revealed the growing importance of transnational relations. The trends of the 20th century will presumably continue and the new challenges will further reinforce the influence of the transnational actors. Non state actors are present in growing numbers at this very level and possess more tools and greater power that enable them to pursue their interest. Their increasing power modify the relations of the different actors – be it interactions between state and non state actor or between non state actors.

In my opinion the dissertation contributes to the enlargement of the Hungarian literature of international relations by summarizing the findings concerning the influence of non state actors and analyzing them in an integrated approach. It exceeds the separated case studies – although used several ones – and studies the characteristics of the system as a whole, the evolution of the capabilities of non state actors and the trend of the change of their number. It offers an approach to be used for the analysis of the international and transnational relations of the 21st century and highlights the actors to be considered more seriously in the future.

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