

International Community – Rhetoric and Reality

Urgent political action is often legitimized with reference to the “international community”. What is meant by this term remains unclear: Is it the states themselves or their organizations, like the United Nations? Is it civil society actors who are requested to help in transnational solidarity? Is it the rich “Western” democracies, which shoulder the responsibility for the world? In political parlance the term is utilized in all of the above senses, hence complicating its meaning.

Two main perspectives on the “international community” can be distinguished: On the one hand, the term in a normative-solidary way refers to shared universal values founded in international law and mainly borne by international organizations. On the other hand, it describes individual or collective agents who act in the name of the “international community”, while often pursuing self-interests. However, both perspectives disregard the interplay of different actors who influence and shape politics by rhetorical means.

This dynamic needs to be captured. The “international community” constitutes a frame of reference within which specific situations can be judged politically and normatively. At the same time, it serves the construction of groups who get politically involved in its name. Furthermore, as a practical and rhetorical reference, the “international community” can be drawn on to legitimize international and local politics. Referring to it, however, does not reveal anything about the respective actor’s value orientation. On top of this, the “international community” itself is subject to a steady change of values. The term’s essence thus consists in its politically ambivalent use. Rhetoric and reality of the “international community” can only be identified and derived from specific examples.

Despite the “international community’s” omnipresence in media and science, a systematic appraisal of the phenomenon is still lacking. The thematic focus of this issue of *Security and Peace* can only serve as a starting point. In this regard, we elaborate on the interplay between image and practice of the “international community”. In the introductory article, we consider conceptual aspects, which serve as a guiding framework for this special issue’s contributions.

Eva Gross, then, describes the “international community’s” increasing fragmentation in the case of the (re-)construction of Afghanistan. While at first the UN was supposed to assume the task of political coordination, the intervention more and more turned into a matter of “the West”. The latter’s inflexible ideas

of statehood hinder a stronger inclusion of local realities and regional actors in the shaping of policies.

How states are stigmatized as “rogue states” and the implications of this are scrutinized by *Martin Beck* and *Johannes Gerschewski*. They argue that such labeling excludes these states from the “international community,” and also limits the community’s members scope of action. The affected regimes find themselves in the paradoxical situation of being morally excluded while the legal and structural inclusion endures. They can avoid the intended transformation by using the divergent interests within the community of states to their own benefit.

Amy Forster Rothbart shows that the post-Soviet states Kazakhstan and Ukraine have mainly signed onto international environmental agreements in order to be recognized and treated as equal partners by the “international community”. The purpose of accession was to demonstrate democracy, rule of law and “good global citizenship”. Meanwhile, agreement implementation also called for internal reforms. Their results are divergent – depending on the will of local elites.

Taking the Moldovan region of Transdniestria as an example, *Daria Isachenko* scrutinizes how quests for independence are legitimized by pointing to the “international community”. The contribution focuses on virtual techniques which help to simulate democracy in order to underscore the claim to sovereignty. As a normative frame the “international community” takes thus effect on political practice.

Outside the focus of this issue, *Detlev Justen* examines and assesses the Convention on Cluster Munitions of late 2008 and its key regulations. *Markus Kaim* evaluates NATO’s efforts in countering international terrorism. *Diana Digol* gives in her article an overview of Russian positions on its 2008 military conflict with Georgia.

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