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NGOs' role in global governance: bringing global health on the Agenda

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ABSTRACT

Concerning threats emerging alongside globalisation, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have increasingly been active on the international political scene. What are NGOs' strategies and characteristics in multi-level and meta-governance (Jessop 2002)? When addressing global health, will they be long-lasting, agenda-setting and policy-implementing actors comparable to their impact on environment governance?

In a world facing global threats demanding global answers, the end of the Westphalian model is nigh (Fidler 2003). More and more actors participate in global governance. Yet alone the word “global” implicates the growing importance of actors beyond governmental or intergovernmental organisations, i.e. business, foundations or media representatives, non-state actors such as civil society organisations (CSOs). The latter have been officially welcomed by the United Nations or the European Commission and *peu à peu* proving their legitimacy (Biermann 2004; Eising and Kohler-Koch 2004). As a consequence of globalisation, single initiatives from local or national NGOs, bound to have limited funding, scope and political weight would be rather inefficient. So far global, i.e. transnational civil society has proven to be the most efficient player in global health.

This paper examines in the first place the role NGOs' endorsed within global politics and how international relations shifted from traditional Westphalian state centred systems towards transnational networks (1). Then, having examined the emergence of the issue of global health it considers the role non-state actors have been playing in global health governance (2). Finally, the paper concludes on the degree of influence of NGOs, especially in the EU, drawing a parallel with NGOs' action on environmental issues (3).

The evaluation of civil society's role in global governance, among others, has been tackled by Ann M. Florini (Florini 2000) and Tanja Börzel (Börzel 2005). More specific research concerning its role in global environment (GEG) or health governance (GHG) had been published by Tanja Brühl (Brühl 2003), Kelley Lee (Lee, Buse et al. 2002) and Wolfgang Hein (Hein 2006). Further, my project inscribes itself in the school of thought of Alex Warleigh (Warleigh 2001).

Global Health is on its way of becoming the nuts and bolts not only of general public opinion but also in research. Global health for its part implies the shift from “international public health” to interdependent health needs in view of global threats such as virus resistance, rapid disease spread through intense travel patterns and further consequences of global

environmental change (GEC) such as water shortage (Kickbusch and Lister 2006). Health rights have shown to be a solid vector when dealing with global health. A multiplication of conferences and meetings at international level are a sign of its relevance for global governance. Civil society for its part is acquiring an substantial weight in international discussion rounds on global health and stands increasingly for expertise, funding opportunities and norm-setting (Hein and Kohlmorgen 2007).

This paper is a segment of the forthcoming thesis "A Governance Issue for European Civil Society: Global Health and the EU" (working title).

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