

Agata Fijalkowski (ed.). ***International Institutional Reform: 2005 Hague Joint Conference on Contemporary Issues of International Law.***

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In light of current global challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, environmental degradation, poverty and pandemic diseases, corruption, and shifts of military, political and economic power, the reform of international institutions is a hotly debated topic, and this book gives due account to that fact. It aptly reflects a great variety of opinions from distinguished academics and practitioners commenting on a broad range of skilfully selected subjects. The agenda includes more abstract topics such as the reformability of international organizations (at 1–26) and alternative paths to international institutional reform (at 308–335), as well as rather specific issues such as the discussion about a permanent war damage compensation commission (at 27–47) and reform issues

concerning specialized and niche international institutions (at 238–266). A certain emphasis is rightly placed on the United Nations, one session dealing with the expanding powers of the Security Council (at 48–82) and another with UN reform as such (at 165–181).

All of the chosen topics lend themselves to lively debates, although the reports on the various sessions demonstrate this to different degrees. While some reports provide excellent documentation of diverse viewpoints, others have inevitably left gaps where papers were not received on time or where the discussion was little more than a summary of the panelists' presentations. Overall, however, the book displays a wide array of options and positions, and examines a substantial number of case studies in a comparative fashion. Its particular strength lies in the combination of scholarly legal analysis, along with a quest for practicable solutions to specific problems often requiring a great degree of flexibility and imagination. Oscillating between these two perspectives, the panels discuss a number of key issues such as funding, membership, ownership of the process, accountability, privatization, doubling of institutions and forum-shopping, formal versus informal solutions, stepwise approaches versus ad hoc coalitions of the willing, self-dissolution of institutions versus claims for their perpetuation, as well as the important role of non-governmental organizations.

One may contend that an even more interdisciplinary and theory-based approach would have added further substance to the book. This would have allowed a more systematic approach to dealing with issues such as institutional effectiveness, institutional design and change, compliance, as well as forum shopping, institutional overload and fragmentation, although several of the related questions are raised in the panels on alternative paths to international institutional reform (at 308–335), and on the interplay between national, regional and international courts (at 182–209). In addition, the comparative perspective might have been further strengthened in order to assess the peculiarities of particular institutions on the one hand, and the transferability

of potential reform solutions on the other hand. The conclusions taken in the final session (at 342–344), which would have presented a good opportunity to achieve this, remain somewhat vague, and the session on The Hague as leading host of international organizations (at 336–341) appears a little too self-referential. However, these desiderata are rather marginalized by the strengths of this book.

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