

Article and Book Reviews

Does Global Governance Exist?

G20 Governance for a Globalized World, by John J. Kirton
(Ashgate, 2013, 427 pp.)

The world suffers from chaos and needs order – almost everyone would agree with this. Lately, we have been under the impression that political and economic cataclysms had been left in the past, but the financial crisis of 2007 and the European debt crisis that followed, as well as the slowdown of global economic growth, are raising again the question of how to solve such problems.

One of the popular answers to this question is the concept of global governance, which implies close cooperation among the world's largest economies in order to solve problems related to the economy, finance and development. John J. Kirton's most recent book, *G20 Governance for a Globalized World*, focuses on one of the most well-known institutes of global economic governance, the Group of 20 (G20).

This book is the first real attempt to explain and describe the G20 both from the perspective of the theory of international relations and through its practice. The book is encyclopedic: part of it is a theoretical discussion on the place and role of the G20 in the global system, and more than a half of the text describes the evolution of the forum, its evolving agenda and the results of each of the summits up to and including the 2010 Toronto Summit.

Kirton argues with the critics who consider the G20 to be an excessive and non-independent institution but he would not agree with those either who think that in time G20 will replace other institutions of global governance. For Kirton, the G20 is a systemic hub connecting the largest institutions (the International Monetary Fund, the Financial Stability Board, the Group of Seven) with the largest economies of the world. He agrees that other configurations are emerging as well, such as the G2 of China and the United States, the G4 with Brazil, Germany, India and Japan, and the BRICS, but he does not see any problem with this development.

The central priority for Kirton is the development of all kinds of cooperation among states in order to respond to the challenges emerging from the world economy, which these days are produced not by countries as before, but by private actors.

Kirton presents several good reasons for a club like the G20 to exist both in the realistic tradition as well as in the liberal and critical (political-economic) traditions. His model is built on the idea of flexible coalitions based on three principles: any country may enter any coalition; coalitions may touch upon any issue; even most important G20 members will finally agree with the decisions taken by the group. The model is based on the concert equality model of governance that Kirton has developed to analyze the work of the Group of Eight, which he later adapted to the G20.

The theoretical discussion takes up a relatively small part of the book, and the bulk of the text analyzes the forum's activities, the history of its establishment and its evolution. The book contains an enormous amount of facts in much detail and will be a good source of information for everyone interested in the G20.

Three of the five parts of the book deal with the history of this young international institution. While one part deals with the period when the G20 was a venue for the meetings of finance

ministers and central bank governors, starting from the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98, another part describes the period marked by relatively stable economic growth allowing the G20 to consolidate itself and start looking for methods of improving global economic governance. The third part begins with 2008, when the G20 was transformed into a forum of the leaders of its members, which in turn was caused by the largest financial crisis in 2007, later transforming into a deep crisis of debt and recession.

Kirton found perfect titles for his chapters, which are very informative. For example, Chapter 11 is called “Containing Contraction, London 2009.” This chapter certainly focuses on the London Summit discussions, where participating countries were looking for means to soften the crisis.

The book extensively discusses the issues of G20 effectiveness and the questions of the compliance of different countries with their G20 decisions. This part of the book is very informative as well and uses its own methodology. Kirton summarizes the results of his own research undertaken over a period of many years.

At the same time, Kirton does not specifically address the question of incompatibility among members’ national interests, a critical issue that weakens and limits the G20’s effectiveness somewhat. This is a pity as this issue is central to the work of all international institutions; this is why our ancestors used to say “what is good for a Russian may be deadly for a German.”

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