

# The Influence of International Regimes on The Act of States on The Basis of Croatia Studies

Guanhua Xu\*

Department of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs Management, China Foreign Affairs University,  
Beijing, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: Xuguanhua@cfau.edu.cn

**Abstract.** The role of international organizations in the dissemination of ideas has been widely recognized by constructivist scholars. However, the question of how international organizations influence sovereign states has not been well answered. The classical constructivist discourse provides some good insights, particularly into the relationship between the principle of state sovereignty and the collective identity of states. And the field of international law, which is closely related to international organizations, has been introduced into the consideration of constructivist scholars. In the post-cold-war, the ever-changing international community, examples of the application of this unique approach are constantly being found. As a region with a weak sense of historical identity, the Balkan states provide a good example for the theory of international organizations constructing national identity and interests. Croatia is one of the most representative countries. By joining the WTO, great progress has been made towards the goal of economic and security integration with Europe. It showed that international organizations can influence sovereign states to accept their ideas. The working model of this fact is to negotiate the acceptance by the state of the provisions of the basic documents of the organization and to force the state to comply through a series of corresponding procedures. This article uses historical and documentary methods to sort out the documents related to it, using historical materials from the English world and Croatia academia. The perspective of constructivism is also an important component of the research method. Future studies may further explore the mechanism of this mode of influence and apply this paradigm of international organization and international law to more and more literature and empirical studies.

**Keywords:** Constructivism, International organizations, Balkan states.

## 1. Introduction

As the main actors in the international community, sovereign states are often regarded as the main source of the emergence and development of ideas. However, this is only true for some countries. For many more countries, international organizations are the main source of ideas. For the latter, they are often some countries that are relatively backward or are not integrated into the international community so early. They need help from international organizations and other countries in economic, political, and legal matters, and are therefore more receptive to the ideas they advocate.

From a constructivist perspective, international organizations are often powerful because of their role in disseminating ideas and cultures. In his research, Finnemore uses three cases to explain the important role of international organizations in this field: the organizations make actors accept their ideas through cooperation and compromise, and form the common concept of the international community, namely culture. After the formation of culture, the identity and interests of actors would have been redefined [1]. However, although constructivism studies constantly emphasize the importance of international organizations and concepts, they often focus on the question of whether this influence exists, while neglecting to explore the mechanism of how it actually influenced the countries.

Theoretically speaking, existing studies have made in-depth and specific studies on the formation of paradigms in the international community. There is also a wealth of case studies on international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the European Union. However, as one of the important actors in the international community, the role of international organizations as a whole has not received enough attention. Constructivism scholars,

such as Wendt, Finnemore, and Qin Yaqing, have identified the important role of international organizations in the dissemination of ideas and are often mentioned in debates against neo-liberal institutionalism. However, in these debates, people tend to focus on proving the existence of influence mechanisms around international organizations, rather than proving the operation principles of these mechanisms through empirical analysis. International organizations, by advocating standards and rules that influence the behavior of states, have always been important to some schools of thought [2]. Past research has divided people's opinions on this issue into three schools: materialistic realism, neoliberal institutionalism, and sociological constructivism, among which constructivism is the newest and most radical. Thus, it is also a method that is not well developed theoretically and empirically [2]. This paper hopes to sort out the existing research results on the influence of international institutions on the act of states, reflect on the existing results, and put forward a potentially useful empirical model, so as to provide a direction for further research.

Empirically speaking, the end of the Cold War is one of the most important events in international politics in the 20th century. It not only completely changed the pattern of the world but also has an impact that is still very important today. It is worth noting that after communism withdrew from Eastern Europe, the international community, as the object of constructivism, welcomed many new members [3]. A large number of these countries have shown a strong interest in becoming part of the mechanism, and many of them have succeeded. The researches concerning these countries are important and have been paid much attention in previous studies<sup>1</sup> [4].

Croatia is one of them. It was a member of the former Yugoslavia. After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the history of Croatia is a history of political transformation, the history of international cooperation, and the history of national identity transformation [5]. It is worth noticing that the mainstream discourse system in Croatia has changed from nationalism to Europeanization in the process of political transformation, and this change has been accompanied by the deepening of international cooperation in Croatia. The key players in this process are not regional powers or neighboring countries, but two important international organizations: the European Union (EU) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). After its accession to the WTO, Croatia had been able to emerge from its economic development difficulties and its economic growth rate had increased from 0.4% in 1999 to 3.7% in 2000, a figure that had reached a staggering 7.1% in 2001. Increased investment by entrepreneurs has created a large number of jobs. Tourism has grown rapidly, with 7.8 million people vacationing in Croatia in 2001, 85% of whom came from abroad. Interest rates on deposits have fallen and bank deposits have increased, many of the old government debts were fully repaid in 2003. It has also greatly accelerated Croatia's integration into the European economic and security community. After joining the WTO in 2000, Croatia significantly reduced import tariffs on agricultural products and videos, and in 2001 liberalized price controls on petroleum products, black bread, fertilizers, telephones, and newspapers. The opening of trade has resulted in increased opportunities for international cooperation-- Croatia signed the SAA treaty with the EU in 2001, paving the way for accession to the EU. In 2002, Croatia has joined CEFTA, which provides a lot of convenience for the trade activities of the member states. Not only that, Croatia has applied for a World Bank structural adjustment loan, namely SAL, and signed a MAP compact with NATO [6]. All this shows that Croatia is accelerating its integration into the international community and is enjoying the dividends it brings.

In the process of interaction between these international organizations and the international community, it is interesting to observe and think about how their institutions and mechanisms affect other actors. Because it will not only give us new insights into Croatia and Central and Eastern European countries but also make us reflect more deeply on some of the doubts that already exist. That may include, how international organizations operate to facilitate the spread of ideas. The

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<sup>1</sup> As researchers from a country following a socialist path, Chinese researchers have rich experience in the reform of state-owned enterprises, market opening, and national liberalization in Croatia. With Croatia's accession to the European Union, Europeanization research has been gradually put on the agenda by these Central and Eastern European researchers.

application of constructivist classical discourse will not only provide a method for us to analyze the situation in Croatia but also extend the extension of the theory itself and gain new insights. In addition to the theoretical methods of constructivism, the methods of historical data analysis and literature analysis are also used in this paper. The study draws on relevant historical data from scholars in the English-speaking World, China, and Croatia, and is supported by several international organization documents, primarily the WTO.

## **2. International Organization From the Perspective of Construction: From Institution to Idea**

As far as the practical significance of constructivism is concerned, the formation of collective identity makes the argument that the individual and the national group need to be coordinated and contain meaningful policy content. On the one hand, this means that attempts by the major western powers to force all countries of the world to comply fully with universal norms are counterproductive. Because when a country feels that its individuality is threatened, it feels insecure and unwilling to join the community of universal norms. On the other hand, if a country places too much emphasis on protecting its individuality, it will also reject Kant's cultural norms, and a collective identity will not be formed. That is why the principle of state sovereignty is both a key principle and a double-edged sword in international politics. However, the discussion of sovereignty is usually not well answered in the study of international organizations and international law. Therefore, it seems to be a feasible way to review the theoretical system construction of constructivism and find out the answer that international organizations want.

### **2.1. The Constructivist Theory**

Constructivism holds that significant aspects of international relations are shaped by ideational factors, not simply material ones [7]. When talking about ideas, it refers to factors such as history and social structure. Constructivism, therefore, is a social theory of international relations. In contrast to other well-known approaches and theories in international relations, constructivism holds that the identities and interests of actors are variables of social construction and that their identities are not immutable and cannot be assumed from the outside [8]. It mainly attempts to demonstrate, contrary to the assumptions of neorealism and neoliberalism, how the core aspects of international relations are socially constructed. This means that ongoing social practices and interactive processes provide their form. Alexander Wendt proposed two basic constructivist principles: "that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature" [9]. This does not mean that constructivism regards international politics as "ideas all the way down", but that international politics has both material factors and conceptual factors. Constructivism focuses not only on the causal explanation of phenomena but also on the analysis of how things are constituted [10]. For example, in research on national security, the focus is on the constraints of culture and identity on security policies and related behaviors. Identity, then, will be necessary to ensure at least some degree of predictability and order. The object of constructivist discourse can be seen as the recent arrival of disputes over the ontological status of epistemology, sociology of knowledge, subject/structure, and social fact, which is a fundamental factor in international relations [11]. The notion that states relations are influenced by power politics and ideas is shared by authors who call themselves constructivist theorists [12]. According to this view, the basic structures of social science, education, and international politics will all be social rather than strictly material. This leads social constructivists to believe that changes like social interaction between states can lead to fundamental shifts towards greater international security. This is the core notion of constructivism: that ideas are important and that actors are socially constructed, not given. Moreover, different from other mainstream international relations analysis methods, constructivism tends to regard the subject as a dependent variable.

## **2.2. International Organizations In the Construction of A Nation**

According to Wendt's theory of socialization, ideas construct identity, and identity determines interests [9]. In the institutional interpretation, international organization is the ideal form of international cooperation [13]. Such a view is *ex parte*, because it only sees the influence of the state as an actor on the international structure, but ignores the reaction of the international structure to the state. The power of international organizations is enormous. They make ideas accepted by actors and form culture so that their identities and interests are redefined.

Alastair Iain Johnston offers a systematic explanation of the way international organizations make an impact. First, it must be recognized that an international organization is a social environment in which individuals and small groups can meet and interact with each other. In this social environment, gradual adaptation can lead to changes in national interests and preferences. In interaction, different actors will come to realize whether their interest's conflict or are in harmony. The basic theoretical view is that identity and interest are not innate but are created and recreated through social interaction -- in other words, after such social interaction, individuals and small groups often have different views on social groups. They believe that they share certain interests with these groups and have different definitions of their interests. In short, the interests of actors may change as they join a new social environment, and international organizations are an important social environment in international relations. Therefore, constructivism focuses on different social mechanisms through which the social environment influences the identity, interests, and behaviors of participants. For international organizations, such an influence mechanism is called "socialization", and this "socialization" process is mainly carried out in three ways. From the micro point of view, this is a process of "persuasion" and "imitation". And for the big picture, it is the "social influence" that played a role in the process [14].

## **3. Croatia: From Tudjmanism to Europeanization**

From "concept" to "social influence", it indicates that the research on the concept of constructing international organizations has gone far enough. However, some case studies of specific organizations may give us more ideas. Stone has made an in-depth study of the failure of IMF loans in Africa. According to the basic constructivist assumption, which was the IMF's original conception, the international community's expectations of African countries would be fulfilled with conditional lending programs, and the countries would be built to look like everyone wanted them to. But that's not the case. He calculates that it was the interference of some big powers that prevented this from happening, through interference with the project. This is equivalent to telling people that the coordination of the ideas of international organizations is the key to the realization of the process of "construction". As for the future reform direction of IMF, Stone suggested strengthening its institutional construction to avoid interference from specific countries. This is a call to reflect on the paradigm of international organization rules and regulations, and the study of this paradigm is the most important part of the process of reflection [15].

### **3.1 Constructed Nations in Balkan**

Unlike African countries, the international community's "construction" of the Balkan states has not been a complete failure. From the perspective of the EU accession process, at least Slovenia and Croatia are two countries with relatively smooth construction processes [16]. As an identity that is not very old in Europe, the "Balkan" identity is more like integration -- it is European and more national. Historically, the region has been a client state or part of the rest of Europe, making it a part of Europe itself. After the sudden collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it quickly descended into chaos because of a lack of identity. Something similar happened after the breakup of Yugoslavia, and for the first time, there were pockets of nationalist local identity [17]. The process was interrupted by the vagaries of the international situation in the interval between the two world wars. The emergence of communism in the field of ideology played a complete replacement role. Thus, "Croats" and

"Slovenes" are not exactly concepts like "English" and "French". Not to mention failed attempts like the Balkan.<sup>2</sup> As a result, when attempts to construct from international organizations first arrived, there was not much local resistance [18].

### 3.2 Croatia's Dilemma and Choice

The first to construct a nation in its way was the WTO. It inherited the mission of GATT and was the fastest to incorporate Slovenia as a member. Another country, Croatia, although a late entrant to the WTO, presents a series of "Balkan" problems that make it the most representative Balkan country.

Croatia became independent in 1991 and its primary national strategy was to rid itself of communism. There are many ways to achieve this goal. In the 1990s, Croatia's path to fulfillment was the path of nationalism -- named after their dictator, Tudjmanism. This was influenced by the bloody Balkan wars and the complex ethnic issues in the region [19]. This approach worked during WTO accession negotiations, but it limited the country's further development. From the record of WTO accession negotiations, it can be seen that Croatia still followed the path of local autonomous government in the Yugoslav period in many issues of economic construction at the beginning of independence [20]. This includes but is not limited to measures like making enterprises accept privatization conditions through authoritarian government regulation and passing laws to promote markets from relatively homogeneous parliaments using a series of "movement" approaches to carrying out the reform of state-owned enterprises. But it must also be acknowledged that these measures have achieved considerable success in the process of privatization. This development path can be easily seen by comparing the commitments made by Croatian representatives at different points in the negotiations. By accepting a series of WTO requirements, Croatia further deepened its privatization process, increased market openness, and changed the aspirations of the political elite, leading to a shift in mainstream discourse. The year 2000 marked Croatia's accession to the WTO and the end of the Tudjman era [20]. After the new president took office, Croatia's path to fulfillment became European, and its national memory and culture shifted to embrace Europe.

Being a member of the EU means being aligned with the alliance in areas such as trade policy and border management, which reflects the convergence of national interests and organizational will. The same story followed Croatia's accession to the World Trade Organization. The process of accession to international organizations, legally speaking, means the reform of domestic policies through negotiations and the acceptance of state obligations under the basic documents of the organization, and this means will ultimately lead to the convergence of national interests and organizational will. Therefore, it can be argued that joining international organizations means accepting and implementing the spirit and content of the basic documents of international organizations, which ultimately shape the identity of a country. Accession to the WTO means that Croatia has found its position in this world and completed the construction of its national identity in the era of globalization. Joining the EU meant a deeper national identity: Croatians chose to participate in the international community as a European rather than as a Balkan. This is the choice of the Croatian people, but also the result of international organizations construction.

### 3.3 Reflection on Balkan States and International Organizations

From the perspective of national interests, getting rid of the influence of communism is not only an important demand of Croatia's domestic political development but also the result of the construction of international society. In the age of globalization, tearing the world apart into two separate parts is no longer an option. Such interests are themselves a reality achieved by many countries and organizations. It permeates the discourse of places like Croatia and ultimately shapes their identities. At the same time, the country that has completed such a process is also significant for

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2 The failure of Yugoslavia was partly a sign of the irrationality of the attempt; the fact that the term "Western Balkans" was criticized by most countries in the EU accession negotiations was a sign of this.

the construction of its neighbors. Simmons' research has shown that regional influence mechanisms exist in compliance with international organizations [21]. This is not hard to understand: while Croatia and Slovenia have benefited from trade and border agreements with Europe, their neighbors, driven by interest, are bound to follow suit and also actively seek membership in international organizations such as the European Union. This reflects material interests shaped by international organizations. What about culture and identity? In the Balkan region, where ethnic problems are prominent, this is no less important than economic development. From the perspective of national identity construction by international organizations, this is in line with the historical logic of this region. Becoming part of Europe again, and erasing the borders drawn by people with different lifestyles, maybe the ultimate answer to all political strife and economic stagnation. Moreover, empiricism tells us that it is not a bad thing to let the countries that have completed these tasks do the construction work. It is worth considering; however, how religious differences yield to cultural convergence, and where is the line between international law and the jurisdiction of domestic law? Perhaps they are worth thinking about, or perhaps, having found their own identity, the countries here will have their own answers.

#### 4. Conclusions

Although there had been no consensus around the principle of state sovereignty, the concept of collective identity seemed to diminish the importance of the debate. Moreover, the emergence of supranational organizations such as the European Union has made it difficult to define the scope of sovereignty. In the era of international organizations, state sovereignty is no longer an absolute concept, which is to a large extent influenced by the basic legal documents of international organizations and their unique legal personality.

Is the legal personality of an international organization equal to that of a state? Before asking such a question, it seems that another one should be answered first: are the rights of nations the same? At a time when major powers are conceptualizing and international organizations are using these ideologies to shape the new nation-states, many people are pessimistic about this issue. This has been corroborated by the facts of the Balkan country of Croatia. Through the process of accession to the WTO, Croatia's concept of the national subject has been formed. This paved the way for him to become a European. In the end, by joining the European Union, Croatia achieved its "European dream" and gained stable and clear self-knowledge never before seen in history. The influence of those international organizations on that country showed that international organizations and the international order they represented could shape the identity and interests of states and that the organization's basic documents and related procedures could be one of the influence mechanisms.

For a long time, the constructivist empirical research on the internal socialization of international organizations rarely treats international organizations as a single actor. Even in rare cases, it is only by exploring its impact on the state that it is specifically studied. This is because it accords with the constructivist interest in social interaction at the level of social psychology. International organizations, from the point of view of their legal personality and practical activities, will be constructed and affected. This means that the socialization of international organizations does not directly influence a country's foreign policy, but changes some of its behavior in the international community through its influence on its internal politics. Perhaps it is through this mechanism that international organizations receive influence from the outside world, although the boundary between their internal affairs and external affairs has always been blurred.

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