*EU Asylum Policies. The Power of Strong Regulating States*, by Natascha Zaun (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, ISBN 9783319398280) xvi+315 pp., £72 hc.

This book provides a timely investigation of the recent refugee crisis from the perspective of the historical dynamics that led to the adoption of EU asylum policies. The underlying puzzle is the failure of EU Member States to cooperate effectively during the refugee crisis. To address this, the author conducts a process-tracing analysis combined with before-after scrutiny of *status quo ante* policies after transposition of EU asylum directives. There are two key questions guiding the research: a) –Why do EU policies exceed the lowest common denominator?, and b) –Why has there not been a race to the bottom in refugee protection standards across Europe subsequent to EU legislation?

By drawing on the first phase of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and using the Misfit and Regulatory Competition Model, the findings of the book aim to provide a systematic explanation for the motivations underlying European cooperation in asylum matters and its restrictive results. The key puzzle that it aims to explain is why there was no race to the bottom, despite the fact that CEAS (first phase) represented the lowest common denominator of the strong regulating Member States, as represented by North-Western Europe. The reason why CEAS rules did not constitute the lowest common denominator was because the strong regulating Member States in North-Western Europe were more effective in shaping EU asylum legislation than others. In practice, this meant that these strong regulators tried to impose their own asylum/refugee protection standards onto the weak regulators in Southern Europe. This explains why strong regulators employed the CEAS legislation, which they had influenced in the first place, to bolster their own reforms in asylum policy. The weak regulators in Southern Europe adopted all this EU asylum legislation on paper, yet failed to implement the accompanying reforms in practice due to the huge misfit between EU and their domestic legislation, as well as their lack of administrative capacity.

This book provides a novel and empirically convincing account of why the EU asylum system was not fit for purpose during the refugee crisis. There are two limitations, however, of this study. First, the analysis could have provided deeper insights into the EU asylum law if the second phase of CEAS had been examined as well. Second, the factors explaining the failure of the EU asylum system to cope with the migrant crisis are far more complex than the ones presented by author. Despite these, the book provides an innovative analytical and empirical approach to understanding the regulation of asylum at the European level.

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