

**OANTA, OANTA, Gabriela A. (Ed.), *The Presence of International Organizations in the Evolution of the International Law of the Sea: Thirty Years since the Entry into Force of UNCLOS*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden/Boston, 2025.**

Edited by Dr. Gabriela A. Oanta, Full Professor of public international law at the University of A Coruña (UDC), the book “The Presence of International Organizations in the Evolution of the International Law of the Sea: Thirty Years since the Entry into Force of UNCLOS” makes a substantial and opportune contribution to the understanding of the role played by international organizations in shaping the contemporary international Law of the Sea under the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This volume represents a valuable insight, as it offers an in-depth analysis of how international organizations engage in decision-making processes concerning maritime governance, including the regulation of ocean-based activities, the management of marine natural resources, and the impact on affected communities. This study is also particularly timely, as the adoption of UNCLOS on 16 November 1994 marks three decades since its entry into force – an opportune moment to reflect on its implementation and assess the emerging challenges it faces.

Widely recognized as the “constitution of the oceans”, UNCLOS has long provided a comprehensive legal framework for governing numerous aspects of the use and management of the world’s oceans and seas – from the delimitation of maritime zones and the regulation of marine resources to the protection and preservation of the marine environment, the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes, and more. However, the international context has evolved, giving rise to new challenges such as climate change and ocean acidification, overexploitation of marine resources, and growing interest in new economic activities like seabed mining, among many others. Against such a backdrop, this book highlights the crucial role that international organizations have played – and continue to play – in the interpretation, application and development of UNCLOS provisions and rules within an increasingly dynamic and complex global context.

The book stems from the Conference of the same name, held at the UDC on 23 February 2024, organized within the framework of the Jean Monnet Chair European Union Law of the Sea, with additional support from the European Society of International Law (ESIL). That event brought together professors and researchers from 18 universities across eight European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom), many of whom now contribute to this collective work. Opened with a carefully crafted introduction by the editor, the resulting co-authored volume comprises 16 chapters that explore the influence of international organizations in the evolution of the international Law of the Sea. The book is thoughtfully structured into three main parts which systematise the analysis by differentiating between international organizations of universal scope and those operating at the regional level. A third part is specifically devoted to the European Union (EU), acknowledging its particular importance in this

field. Each part is preceded by a brief and useful introduction, providing readers with a helpful overview of the chapters that follow.

The first part, comprising four chapters, examines the role of universal international organizations in the development of the international Law of the Sea. As the editor herself explains, numerous organizations of this kind have contributed to shaping this legal field. However, the book concentrates on those that have a universal vocation, being open to the participation of all States. Among them are some general-purpose organizations whose activities are not confined to a specific area of cooperation, as well as others that pursue more specific objectives and have been attributed competences related to their particular mandates. Naturally, Chapter 1, authored by Gabriela Oanta (Universidade da Coruña), examines the role of the United Nations – an almost universal organization with 193 Member States and general purposes – to the adoption of UNCLOS and the evolution of the international Law of the Sea. As Dr. Oanta concludes, the United Nations – and its principal organs – has proved to be an important international actor on the maritime scene, facilitating cooperation between other international actors and contributing to reaching consensus and compromises between them.

The subsequent chapters focus on other universal international organizations which pursue specific aims: Chapter 2, by Laura Carballo Piñeiro (University of Vigo), examines the role of the International Maritime Organization (IMO); Chapter 3, by Ilias Plakokefalos (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens), addresses the contribution of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); and Chapter 4, by Mitchell Lennan (University of Aberdeen) and Stephanie Switzer (University of Strathclyde), explores the influence of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Their analysis demonstrates how universal international organizations have played a key role in applying UNCLOS provisions and advancing the development and crystallization of the contemporary international Law of the Sea.

The second part of the book, in turn, examines the influence of regional international organizations and institutionalized cooperation mechanisms in this field. Unlike the universal international organizations discussed in the first part, these ones are closed or restricted international organizations, with a more limited membership composed of States that meet specific criteria established in their constitutive treaties or functioning rules. Such international organizations have been created in response to particular geographical considerations, as well as to recognise shared interests of a group of states in maritime-related matters. The seven chapters that comprise this part explore a diverse range of these international organizations, from those that recognise specific maritime areas of an economic, fishing or environmental nature, to those that respond to geographical proximity. In this regard, Chapters 5 to 8 analyse, respectively: the role of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and Agreements (Chapter 5, by Youri van Logchem, Arctic University of Norway); the Regional Seas Agreements (Chapter 6, by Miguel García García-Revillo, University of Córdoba); the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Chapter 7, by Viljam Engström, Abo Akademi University); and the Port State Control Detention Review Panels (Chapter 8, by Arron N. Honniball, Max Planck Foundation for International Peace and the Rule of Law). Building on this analysis, the following three chapters turn to regional international organizations established in response to geographical contiguity: Chapter 9 examines

the Council of Europe (by Susana Sanz Caballero, University CEU Cardenal Herrera); Chapter 10 explores international organizations in Asia and Oceania (by Géraldine Giraudeau, University of Paris-Saclay); and Chapter 11 focuses on regional international organizations and fora in Africa and Latin America (by Andrea Caligiuri, University of Macerata). They all illustrate how regional international organizations also contribute to the development and strengthening of the international Law of the Sea, within the framework of their competences and areas of activity.

Among the international organizations with the greatest influence on both the development and application of the Law of the Sea, the EU stands out. This prominent role justifies its dedicated analysis in the third and final part of the book, which comprises five chapters. The individualized treatment of the EU is also grounded by its unique nature as an international organization that not only promotes cooperation among its Member States but also pursues their integration in areas where sovereign competences have been transferred to EU institutions. This third part opens with an overall analysis of EU contribution to the development of the international Law of the Sea (Chapter 12, by Guillaume Le Floch, University of Rennes). The subsequent four chapters focus, then, on different manifestations of EU action in relation to the seas and oceans: Chapter 13 (by Eduardo Jiménez Pineda, University of Córdoba) addresses the EU's involvement in the pacific settlement of maritime disputes; Chapter 14 (by Mar Campins Eritja, University of Barcelona) examines the EU action regarding climate change in relation to the marine environment; Chapter 15 (by Jessica NM Schechinger, Artic University of Norway) explores EU's role in combating maritime piracy; and Chapter 16 (by Mercedes Rosello, University of Lincoln) analyses the EU's efforts to address the illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Together, the 16 chapters provide valuable insights into the essential role that international organizations have played in the evolution of the international Law of the Sea. They highlight how these organizations have been fundamental in the development and implementation of UNCLOS, also influencing soft law instruments that guide state practice in this field. The book clearly demonstrates that, without the proactive engagement and sustained efforts of these international organizations, the contemporary Law of the Sea would be significantly different – and certainly less prepared to address emerging challenges in maritime governance.

In conclusion, this rigorous and carefully crafted volume is an indispensable reference for both scholars and practitioners seeking to deepen their understanding of the crucial role that international organizations play in the adoption, interpretation, and application of UNCLOS, as well as in the broader development of contemporary international Law of the Sea.

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