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INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (IGOS) AND THEIR ROLES AND ACTIVITIES IN SECURITY, ECONOMY, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

In the process of globalization, several international actors have emerged besides states. The intergovernmental cooperation resulting from treaties or agreements in the forms of Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) has been viewed as an appropriate mean for dealing with various issues in global and regional levels. Whilst IGOs may focus on a wide range of areas such as education, culture, and political affairs, this study primarily addresses their roles and activities in security, economy, health, and environment. To that aim, their evolution, roles, and activities were elaborated through giving several examples of IGOs. The Union of International Associations' (UIA) online database about international organizations was examined through categorizing the IGOs' main interests as security, economy, health, and environment. The study compared and evaluated the quantities of IGOs considering their types and interests. The number of established IGOs has increased along with the process of globalization. The present study revealed that most IGOs have been established for economic purposes whilst security, health, and environment have been other key interests of IGOs. Economy and security interests have been more common in universal and intercontinental membership organizations. Economy and environment, on the other hand, have been more prevalent purposes in other types of IGOs including regional and financial ones. Health has been the least common interest of IGOs amongst the interests in question. The IGOs such as the UN and NATO have advanced their activities and become more important in the last decades. The evolving role of IGOs shows that they will remain key actors in global system.

Keywords: Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), Roles and Activities of IGOs, Global Security, Economy, Health, Environment.

INTRODUCTION

States emerged in the mid-17th century and have played a leading role in world politics since that time. However, after the Industrial Revolution, the technological advances in information and communication that arose led to globalization. In addition, because of the decline in transportation costs, capital exports and international trading reached unprecedented levels between 1870 and 1914, this progress speeded up after the 1990s (O'Rourke, 2002). The processes and the results of globalization have reduced the states' power and have brought with it vastly different problems. As a result, new actors have begun to take their place along with states in the international system. They have tried to solve emerging problems those have become in the globalization process. In this context, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have gained greater importance and they have played key roles in international system especially after the 1990s.

According to Union of International Associations (UIA), "an IGO is an organization composed primarily of sovereign states, or of other intergovernmental organizations. IGOs are established by treaty or other agreement that acts as a charter creating the group" (What is an intergovernmental organization). This study focuses on the roles and activities of IGOs in security, economy, health, and environment. After evaluating the evolution of IGOs, the author elaborate their roles and activities in security, economy, health, and environment through giving several examples of IGOs. The study carries the issue further by analyzing the numbers of IGOs through categorizing their main interests as peace and security, economy, health, and environment.

The UIA's online database about international organizations, namely "The Yearbook of International Organizations", was analyzed. This database consists of more than 67.000 international organizations including both IGOs and International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs). According to the UIA,

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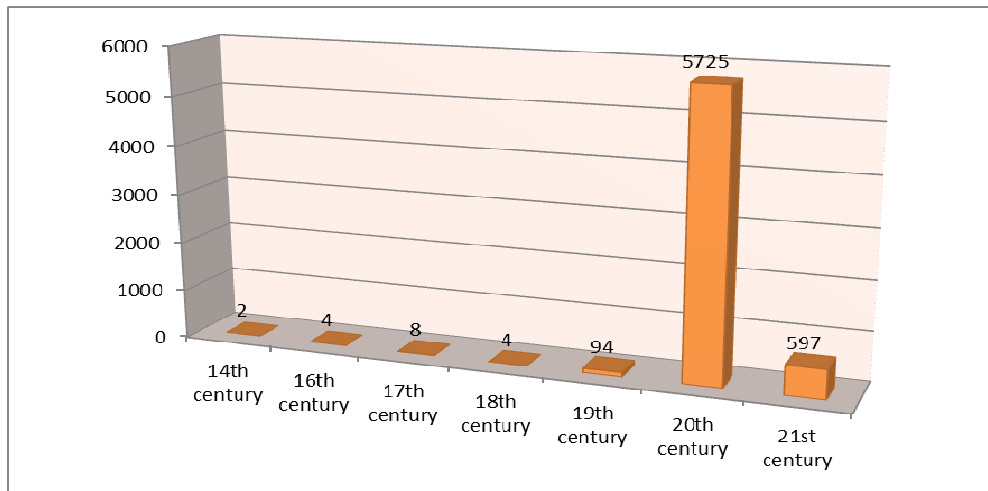
international organizations are categorized as two sets; Type I and Type II (The Yearbook of International Organizations). Type I refers to “the level of internationality of an organization” and Type II adds another dimension to Type I. For the purpose of the study, only active international organizations which have sufficient information for appropriate analyzes have been included in the study. As a result, from the Type I, Type A (“Federations of international organizations”), Type B (“Universal membership organizations”), Type C (“Intercontinental membership organizations”), Type D (“Regionally defined membership organizations”), Type E (“Organizations emanating from places, persons or other bodies”), Type F (“Organizations having a special form”), and Type G (“Internationally-oriented national organizations”) have been selected. The names of IGOs have been retrieved from database through selecting “g”, which stands for “intergovernmental”, from Type II column. At the end, the study reached 2,045 IGOs in total. The researcher searched for detailed records of these IGOs on the UIA website, then evaluated and categorized only their main interests. The IGOs may also involve in several activities apart from their main areas. It may not be possible to find all activities of all IGOs once considering their high numbers in quantity and insufficient data in this regard. Therefore, only ‘the Yearbook of International Organizations’ was analyzed, which may be considered as a limitation of the study. Nevertheless, the study has been seen significant because of its contribution to relevant literature by comparing the IGOs’ key activities involving security, economy, health, and environment.

I. EVOLUTION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

States, as the main decision makers within the international system, mostly prefer to maintain their sovereignty. Accordingly, although there are many coercive mechanisms that can regulate the behaviors of a state inside its borders, this is not so readily implemented on a global scale. When states alone dominated the international system, the IGOs only took on cooperative action roles among states. For that reason, they were just called ‘international organizations’ a term which is still used to describe IGOs. However, the types of transnational organizations that existed previously have been greatly enlarged in the contemporary world. Today, IGOs can be distinguished from other transnational organizations by their state originated features. They have been categorized as ‘global and regional organizations’, ‘supervisory systems for administering non-political international treaty regulation’, and ‘organizations designed to prevent political disputes from leading to war’ (Langhorne, 2006: 79).

As a result of technological improvements and industrialization, international activities speeded up between states in the 19th century, and the regulation and coordination of these activities became a necessity in order to foster economic growth and increase the states’ power. However, the first IGOs were institutionalized with regard to certain activities such as postal services, although they had administrative and regulatory roles in the context of international activity. The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (1815), Conseil Supérieur de Santé (1838), and International Telegraph Union (1865) were some examples of the first IGOs, also known as ‘public international unions’ at that time. Although states established these organizations to deal with the emerging problems created by the prevailing economic and technological changes, they restrained their functions and area of interests. The IGOs were used for gathering and exchanging information, providing coordination of national policies, and specifying basic standards in particular areas. The successful practices of these organizations in reducing cross-border problems led to the expansion of this trend. As a result, in the 20th century, particularly after the world wars, IGOs began to be established for purposes of managing their international activities (Langhorne, 2006). The Figure 1 below indicates the number of established IGOs by centuries. In the 20th century, this number was sharply increased to 5,725. The number of new IGOs has also been increasing in this century.

Figure 1: Number of IGOs by Centuries



Source: UIA Website (<http://www.uia.org/>, retrieved at 2/25/2015)

II. ROLES AND ACTIVITIES OF IGOs

IGOs serve several roles in the international system. They can contribute to cooperative endeavors among states, and by doing so, the socialization of states. Moreover, some IGOs play a role in settling disputes, establishing procedures and forcing their members to obey their rules. Others perform operational activities to solve major global problems. Some IGOs contribute to international bargaining as a medium for negotiation activities. Other IGOs exist to establish transnational networks comprised of other state and non-state actors (Mingst, 2008).

The recent globalization process created as a result of the rapid technological improvements in manufacturing, transportation, communications, and so on has led to the expansion of the international regulatory framework (Langhorne, 2006). In the contemporary world, there are thus a wide range of IGOs involving in activities related to security, economy, health, and environment.

a. Security

It is clear that the most important global organization in the contemporary world is the United Nations (UN). It was established after the Second World War and designed to prevent the repetition of preceding wars and to preserve peace. Thus, the previous failures of its predecessors were taken into account in this design. While the sovereign equality of member states principle remains, unique veto and permanent membership rights have been given to the five great powers in UN Security Council to implement sanctions immediately. After World War II, the Cold War developed and a bi-polar society emerged. During this period, the UN began to expand their activities to other areas. The end of the bi-polarity era brought new opportunities to the UN. Since the end of the Cold War, and later in the 1980s, the nature of conflict changed remarkably because globalization diminished the differences between systemic human rights violations, crimes, and wars. Because of economic globalization, the emergence of small and poor states and the withdrawal of support by the superpowers, the state failures and intra-state conflicts increased (Langhorne, 2006). As a result, the UN has played an active role in intervening civil conflicts and has become an important actor in peacekeeping operations. The number of UN peacekeeping operations increased fourfold between 1988 and 1993. This demand on the UN increased over the last two decades and provided an opportunity to reshape the UN tasks (Calvocoressi, 2009). As a result, the UN has expanded its global security role in the contemporary world to a greater degree than what prevailed 30 years ago.

Globalization has brought along with it not only global security problems, but also economic problems, especially over the last two decades. In this respect, the UN continues to play a key role in global governance in the contemporary world, and global governance is clearly needed in five areas where there are gaps, namely in knowledge, normative, policy, institutional, and compliance areas. In order to fill these gaps to some extent, the UN generates data and creates and disseminates theoretical explanations, codifies norms, prepares global policies and uses its institutionalized structure to deal with specific problem areas and tries to achieve consensus between members (Weiss & Thakur, 2010). In this sense, UN is also a key actor in economy, health, and environment.

Some of the IGOs were established with the aim of providing stability and security in their regions. One of the significant IGOs in the contemporary world is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It was established in 1949 in order to provide collective defense against the Soviet Union threat. After the dissolution of Soviet Union and collapse of Berlin Wall, NATO's role was changed due to the impact of increased globalization processes which led to increased intra-state conflicts. The member states that compromised this group required its security mission be conducted in a larger context. As a result, new associations such as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) were established. The PfP was designed to prepare states for joint peacekeeping operations in the region in order to maintain stability in Europe. NATO has evolved in many different ways. However, events after 9/11 changed its agenda markedly. At the Prague Summit in 2002, the changing nature of security challenges was addressed. The current global security problems such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction led to expansion of the activities of NATO outside the region. As a result, NATO began to cooperate with other IGOs, the UN, and non-member countries and has increased its military capacity (Langhorne, 2006).

b. Economy

Globalization facilitates the flow of goods, capital and labor forces across national borders. This flow causes changes in the balance of trade and markets nationally and internationally. Overall, the prosperity of the world-consumer increases from trade; however, incomes in this changing environment are not distributed equally between social classes and industrial sectors. Thus, this form of exchange both locally and globally leads some to emerge as winners in some sectors and classes, while some become losers in other sectors and classes. That is to say, global economic trade causes increases in the income of some groups of people, while it decreases the income of other groups (Gilpin, 1987; Frieden & Lake, 2000). Although international economic exchanges make some people winners and the others losers; societies will ultimately benefit from the income that the trading offers overall. Therefore, the World Trade Organization (WTO), a key intergovernmental actor in global economy, helps nations to realize this goal.

National economies are clearly becoming increasingly dependent upon each other. Accordingly, the flow of many goods across the world has increased significantly and many components of end products are manufactured in different countries from the home producing country. This internationalized state of production has led to a sharp increase in the world's trade capacity. Over the last 60 years, the average world trade capacity has grown 6 percent per year. Thus, the annual world trade capacity increased from \$84 billion in 1953 to \$14 trillion in 2007. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, later became the World Trade Organization (WTO), has a significant role in increasing world trading capacity. Most scientists who have studied the global political economy have argued that if the WTO was not established, world trade would not have grown so rapidly (Oatley, 2010). The WTO has built a platform where governments negotiate, make agreements and solve disputes on trade exchanges. These trade activities are based on some ground rules such as market liberalism and nondiscrimination. By complying with these rules; governments benefit from the implementation of a ruled based system that brings potential gains to all countries. Otherwise an anarchic international system might only serve or benefit strong countries which dominate the international realm. The dispute settlement mechanism the WTO enforces, encourages governments to comply with the rules and regulations they set, however (O'Brien & Williams, 2004).

In addition to the WTO, two more global intergovernmental actors have a significant role in global economy: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Bretton Woods conference held with the aim of establishing post-World War II economic system in 1944 led to establishment of these IGOs. The World Bank was created with the purpose of rebuilding war-torn European states after World War II. However, the Bretton Woods system ceased to exist due to trends in the US economy in the 1960s. The IMF was established for the purposes of dealing with the balance of payment problems and stabilizing exchange rates.

Instead, the number of deregulated liberalized economies spread in the 1980s and 1990s and implementing economic policies into former communist states brought about new global economic problems. The globalization process and the weakened governments in terms of controlling their economic activities in this process paved the way for major economic crises such as the 1995 Mexican peso crises, the 1996 Russian ruble crisis, and the Asian crisis in the late 1990s. The more globalized economy introduced serious problems of stability. Although the IMF expended its energies to reduce the reoccurrence of such crises, its activities were met with some suspicion because of the perception they were protecting the benefits of only one part of global economy. In the early 2000s, its policy, operation and attitudes were modified, and the IMF turned into a political global institution as distinct from a non-political international agency.

The World Bank experienced a similar process as regards issues related to its development. The World Bank has updated itself in the face of new conditions that globalization has helped to bring about. By the end of the 20th century, the developmental problems raised by the globalization process led to changes in both attitudes and structure of institutions, like the IMF.

Between the Cold War years and the end of the 20th century, both the World Bank and the IMF acted in accordance with the interests of their members. However, these IGOs, which deal only with governments, run the risk of being inadequate when governments need assistance and collapse when expected to apply procedures from the outside. In addition, as a result of their growing importance, commercial and private non-state actors have become increasingly involved in the processes of global economic management. These IGOs have moved away from acting in accordance with their members' wishes and have begun to be treated as global authorities when considering the global communities they serve. These changes have made them independent actors on a global scale (Langhorne, 2006).

Moreover, Langhorne (2006) noted that many regional IGOs such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), and African Union emerged in the second half of the 20th century and most of them were economic in their purposes. The most complicated regional IGO is the European Union (EU). The European Community became European Union after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. In the contemporary world, it brings together half a billion people (Mingst, 2008). The EU has had two main purposes; to achieve a European free trade area and establish a con-federal and eventually a federal state. However, the enlargement process has brought about many challenging problems along with administrative and constitutional crises. In this process, the EU's purpose of establishing a federal state seems to be uncertain. Nevertheless, the EU also remains a significant actor in a global scale (Langhorne, 2006).

c. Health

Many IGOs, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), have a role in dealing with global health problems. Their role can be best understood by evaluating their responses to a global epidemic such as HIV/AIDS. In 1987, in order to coordinate the response to HIV/AIDS in a global level, WHO launched the Special Programme on AIDS, which later became the Global Programme on AIDS (GPA). In 1996, GPA was closed down because of failings concerning its handling of the epidemic and UNAIDS was established (Merson, O'Malley, Serwadda, & Apisuk, 2008).

UNAIDS has a leading role in coordinating this response. There are ten cosponsor IGOs to respond HIV/AIDS globally including World Food Programme (WFP), WHO, International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In this structure, while WHO focus on the priority areas of HIV treatment and care and HIV/TB co-infection, the UNICEF concentrate on preventing mother-to-child transmission of the disease. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, UNITAID, and the World Bank are of importance because they help finance the global HIV response.

As a result of joint response, total numbers of newly infected people with HIV and dying from AIDS-related causes continue to decline globally. HIV testing and counseling is important in terms of referring people for appropriate treatment and prevention services. Access to testing and counseling rose from 64 million in 2009 to 72 million in 2010. The coverage of HIV testing among pregnant women increased from 8% to 35% in a five-year period between 2005 and 2010. This means that the health system capacity had been expanded. UNAIDS and WHO have prepared five-year strategies. Not only cure, treatment, and prevention of HIV but also building sustainable and robust health system and structural improvements have been taken into account in these strategies (UNAIDS, UNICEF, & WHO, 2011: 5).

The synergy to prevent HIV/AIDS and the broad participation in response to HIV/AIDS is a good model for the responses to other diseases. For example, some scholars argue how it is possible to apply the success of AIDS response to non-communicable diseases (Lamptey, Merson, Piot, Reddy, & Dirks, 2011: 1). Although the global response to HIV/AIDS may not be adequate, there is evidence that, to some extent, it is progressive and successful. Therefore, this initiative shows the ways of how to respond global health problems collectively and effectively and the importance of the roles of IGOs in such responses.

d. Environment

Global environmental issues such as global climate change and depletion of the ozone layer and the world's fisheries have been considered crucial problems since the early 1970s. Each global environmental

problem, in fact, has an immediate impact on local people; however, local attempts to undertake the responsibility of dealing with these problems are mostly inefficient. Therefore, these local struggles can be better resolved by conveying the issue beyond state borders into the global sphere (Carter, 2007). In this context, IGOs have a crucial role to deal with these problems through conveying them to global arena. Many IGOs such as United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Global Action Plan for Environment and Development in the 21st Century (Agenda 21), and Global Environment Facility (GEF) have dealt with various global environmental problems.

III. ANALYZING THE IGOs IN GLOBAL SYSTEM

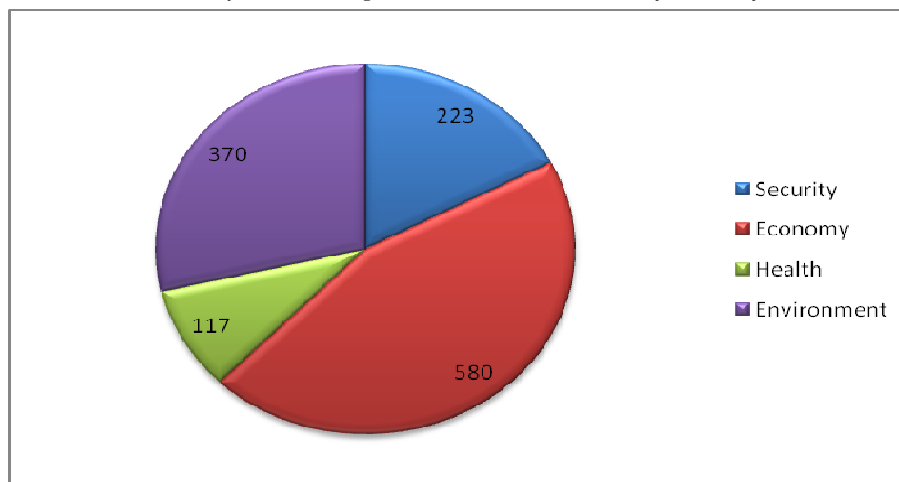
The analysis of UIA database revealed that there may be various aims in the activities of IGOs such as peace and security, economy, health, and environment, as well as education, culture, and standardization. However, the activities of most IGOs have been related to economy consisting of trade, financial markets, and development projects. As shown in Figure 2 below, the study identified 580 IGOs that mainly concentrate on economic activities, which constitutes 28% of total IGOs included in the study.

The environment is the second prevalent interest among IGOs. About 18% of IGOs have primarily aimed to deal with environmental issues. There are many IGOs focusing on the protection of national resources such as fisheries, oceans, and forests, and economic development in a sustainable manner. In these IGOs, both environmental and economic issues have been the main concerns. However, some IGOs have purely concentrated on global environmental problems such as climate change.

Moreover, 223 IGOs, which constitute about 11% of total IGOs, have primarily aimed security in their activities. Some of them have essentially involved in conflict areas, whilst some of them have aimed to prevent real or future security threats. UN is the key actor in peace and security in global arena. About one fourth of IGOs focusing on peace and security are the UN bodies. Additionally, the NATO and European Union bodies are also the other important actors after the UN in this regard.

Health issues are the least common purpose among the IGOs in question. Only 117 IGOs have primarily focused on health-related issues. Many of them have aimed to respond to several infections and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, foot-and-mouth diseases, and avian influenza. Whilst most IGOs dealing with health issues have concentrated on a specific region and sub-region, there are also several IGOs focusing on health issues such as HIV/AIDS and occupational health in a global arena. WHO and its bodies have a leading role in health issues.

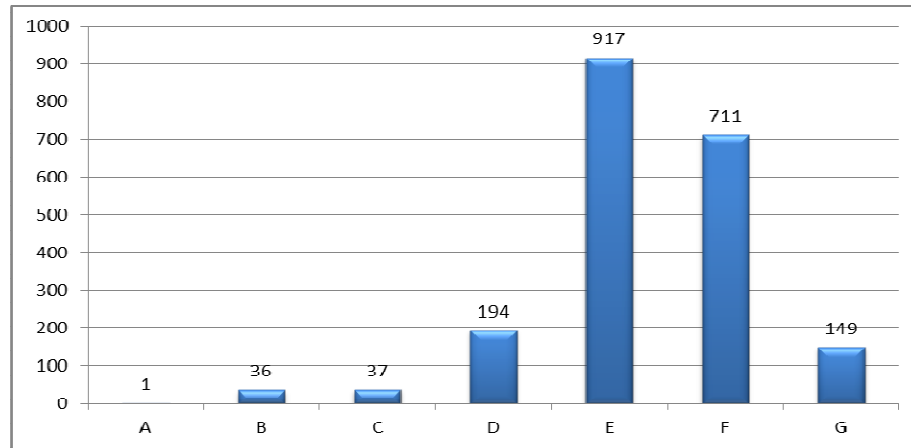
Figure 2: Numbers of IGOs mainly concentrating on the activities about security, economy, health, and environment



Source: The findings of data analysis

In terms of federations of international organizations (Type A), the UN is the only IGO, which has a key role in global governance and focuses on almost all global issues including security, economy, health, and environment. There are few IGOs in Types B and C, which are universal or intercontinental membership organizations. There are more Types D and G IGOs than Types B and C IGOs. However, the quantities of IGOs in Types E and F are considerably high with compared to other types. They both constitute about 80% of total IGOs included in the study.

Figure 3: Number of IGOs by Type I



Source: The findings of data analysis

Note: A, B, C, D, E, F, and G types are defined by UIA as follows:

“Type A: Federations of international organizations

A principal membership category includes at least three autonomous international bodies

Type B: Universal membership organizations

Membership covers at least 60 countries regardless of distribution, or membership covers at least 30 countries and is equitably distributed over several continents

Type C: Intercontinental membership organizations

Membership exceeds that of a particular continental region, covers at least 10 countries, and is equitably distributed over at least two continents

Type D: Regionally defined membership organizations

Membership and preoccupations restricted to a particular continental or sub-continental region or contiguous group of countries, and covers at least 3 countries or includes at least 3 autonomous international bodies

Type E: Organizations emanating from places, persons or other bodies

May include international centres and institutes created by intergovernmental bodies, and joint bodies, regardless of membership

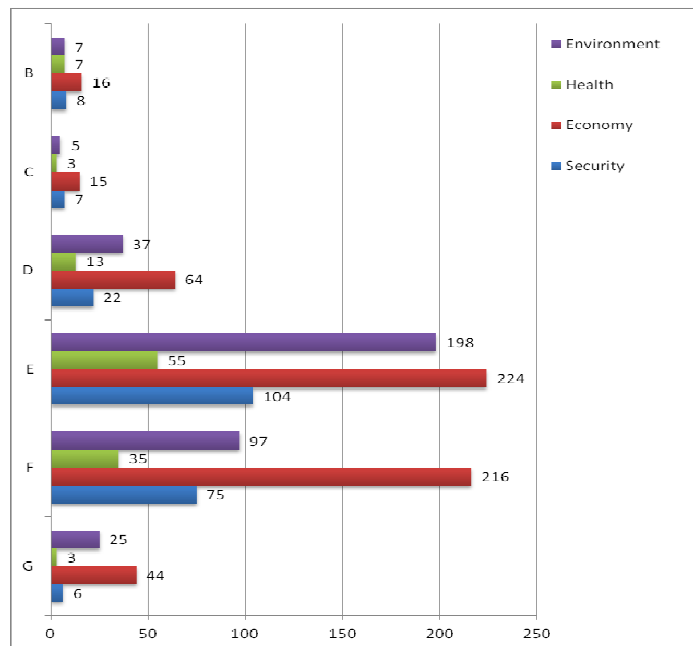
Type F: Organizations having a special form

May include foundations, funds, banks, and illegal or unusual bodies

Type G: Internationally-oriented national organizations

Includes bilateral bodies, organizations with membership or management structure limited to a single country yet name or activities indicate an international character, and national bodies with formal links (member, funder, partner) with a body of the UN system or other international organization” (The Yearbook of International Organizations)

Figure 4: Numbers of IGOs categorized by their main interests and types



Source: The findings of data analysis

Figure 4 above indicates the numbers of IGOs according to their key interests (security, economy, health, and environment) and types (B, C, D, E, F, and G). It is obvious that the numbers of IGOs principally focusing on economic activities are the highest in all types. Thus, one can claim that economic activities may

be the most important issue within all types of IGOs. On the other hand, almost in all types, health is the least common interest among the interests in question.

In universal and intercontinental membership organizations (Types B and C), there are several economic IGOs involved in specific fields such as pepper, grains, cocoa, olive, sugar, coffee, rubber, cotton, lead, and zinc. In the other types (D, E, F, and G), regional economic cooperation among states, such as Arab, Asian, American, African, European, Pacific, Caribbean, Nordic, South East Asian, and so on, are common in the forms of economic communities.

While the large majority of universal and intercontinental membership organizations mainly focus on the four areas in question, the interests of other types IGOs (Types D, E, F, and G IGOs) are varied. Education, culture, human rights, information and communication, transportation, law, scientific research, social and political affairs are among these interests. Additionally, in Types B and C IGOs, security is the second interest after economy; nevertheless, environment is the second concern in the other types of IGOs. One can claim that peace and security activities may more require collective action in global level to deal with such issues; on the other hand, there may be more regional and sub-regional intergovernmental cooperation on environmental issues which may affect relevant regions. Another reason for the high quantities of Types D, E, F, and G IGOs focusing on environmental activities may be the high volume of economic activities that require the use of natural resources in a particular region. There are many examples of IGOs dealing with both economic and environmental activities. For example, in fisheries, forestry, and agriculture, the sustainable use of water, oceans, seas, forests, river basins, and so on has been kept on the agenda by states.

CONCLUSION

The advancements in communication and transportation technologies have accelerated globalization processes since the 1990s. The roles and activities of intergovernmental organizations have enlarged in this process. IGOs' supervisory and regulatory roles have evolved and are highly varied today. The present study revealed that most IGOs have been established for economic purposes. Security, health, and environment have been other key interests of IGOs. The quantities of IGOs focusing on security, economy, health and environment can be varied in all types of IGOs. Economy and security interests have been common in universal and intercontinental membership organizations, whereas economy and environment have been main purposes in the other types of IGOs including regional and financial ones.

The networks of IGOs in security and economic activities have become more complicated, and not only states but also non-state actors have begun to cooperate with each other to solve global problems. The associated increase in trans-governmental networks has led to an increase in the numbers and significance of IGOs. For example, the UN's roles and scope of activities have been expanded from security to a great many areas. The UN has also been viewed as important because of its evolving role in filling the global governance gaps in recent years. Additionally, globalization has led to changes in both the attitudes and structure of economic global institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF and they became global authorities considering the global community. NATO, a regional security organization, has changed its structure to deal with evolving global security problems. These recent changes in the role of IGOs show that IGOs will continue to be important actors in global arena.

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