Foreword

The discipline of international relations is in disarray, now that sovereign national states are no longer its exclusive actors. But what can non-state, non-governmental actors accomplish – or prevent from happening? In this pioneering work, Hannah Murphy explores both the potentialities and limits of NGO intervention in the substantive arena of international trade policy. Her empirical findings are paradoxical: the WTO does not formally include such organizations in its negotiations, yet its agenda and member-state alliances are informally influenced by them. Her theoretical conclusions are unorthodox: the influence of these NGOs is neither confined to their ‘radical’ capacity for the mobilization of protest, nor to their ‘constructivist’ impact upon the norms of national representatives, nor to their ‘realist’ conformity to prevailing conceptions of national interest. Rather, she finds the answer in the obscure corridors of something called ‘governance’ where public and private actors interact, try to convince each other, exploit momentary crises, provide alternative wordings, form transnational factions, and sometimes contribute to forming a consensual rather than a hegemonic solution.

Philippe C. Schmitter
Professor Emeritus
European University Institute