



From Autonomy to Integration?

International Law, Free Trade and the Environment

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In recent years, the debate on trade and the environment seemed to lose some of its earlier controversy: after a string of highly polarizing cases before the WTO, the Appellate Body's Article 21.5 Implementation Report in the Shrimp/Turtle case appeared to finally herald a period of reconciliation between free trade and environmental concerns. Upon closer analysis, however, this assessment proves to be misleading: as a matter of substantive law, the chasm between both issue areas is still substantial.

Our current understanding of so-called "self-contained regimes" is based on an overly simplistic appreciation of how such regimes interact with each other and with the larger body of international law.

Drawing on an analysis of WTO case law, this article by Anja Lindroos and Michael Mehling highlights two distinct normative relations, addressing the relationship of international trade law vis-à-vis general international law and international environmental law.

As the analysis reveals, further differentiation of normative relationships is needed to better understand how such seemingly independent regimes operate in a fragmented legal system. It also shows that a recently proposed interpretative tool, systemic integration, raises new questions and challenges traditional conceptions of international treaty law.

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[Prof. Dr. Michael Mehling, LL.M.](#)
Anja Lindroos

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