

The EU as a Global Player

The Politics of Interregionalism

Edited by
**Fredrik Söderbaum and
Luk van Langenhove**

The EU as a Global Player

A new look at the European Union's role as a global actor, with special focus on the theme of interregionalism in its relations with key regions around the world: Africa, Asia, South America, North America and Central-Eastern Europe.

This new collection clearly shows how, since the end of the Cold War, the European Union has gradually expanded its external relations and foreign policies and become a global actor in world politics. During the last decade interregionalism has become a key component of the EU's external relations and foreign policies. In fact, the EU has quickly become the hub of a large number of interregional arrangements with a number of regions around the world. Promoting regional and interregional relations not only justifies and enhances the EU's own existence and efficiency as a global 'player', the strategy also promotes the legitimacy and status of other regions, giving rise to a deepening of cross-cutting interregional relations in trade and economic relations, political dialogue, development cooperation, cultural relations and security cooperation.

This book was previously published as a special issue of the leading *Journal of European Integration*.

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Preface

This book has its origins in a two-year research project funded by the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS) on the overall theme of “The role of the EU in the world”. As part of this project we invited some leading scholars to contribute to a special issue of the *Journal of European Integration* (JEI), vol. 27, no. 3 (2005) entitled “The EU as a Global Actor: The Role of Interregionalism”.

Our group of authors has had many and at times intense meetings and conversations throughout the project. The majority of the contributors met to exchange views and discuss papers in a section on “States, Regions and Regional World Orders” at the 5th Pan-European International Relations Conference of the Standing Group of International Relations (SGIR) held in The Hague, 9–11 September 2004. The discussants and participants to that section are all gratefully acknowledged. We have, in particular, greatly benefited from the comments of Björn Hettne, who has reviewed all the papers, as well as from the inputs of all the anonymous reviewers.

We are also deeply indebted to Emil Kirchner, JEI’s Executive Editor, for supporting the project from the beginning and later promoting the book at Routledge. And we extend our gratitude to JEI’s editing team, Hans Michelmann and Susan Sydenham, for invaluable assistance, comments and not the least corrections. Warm thanks also to Ana-Christina Costea at UNU-CRIS for her assistance in helping out with the manuscript. Gratitude also goes to Amber Bulkley and the Routledge team for encouragement and support in the completion of the volume.

Fredrik Söderbaum and Luk van Langenhove, January 2006

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Introduction: The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism

FREDRIK SÖDERBAUM* & LUK VAN LANGENHOVE**

1. The Theme

The European Union's external relations and foreign policies have expanded dramatically since the end of the Cold War and the establishment of the EU

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through the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. Today the EU has relations with virtually every country and most regions in the world. The EU has become a force in international affairs, especially in trade, development cooperation, the promotion of regional integration, democracy and good governance, human rights and, to an increasing extent, also in security policies.

There are, however, many different views on what type of political animal the EU actually is and on the nature and impact of its external relations. Some critics argue that the EU has diffuse and ineffective foreign policies, based on no genuinely common values; in essence, that the EU is an incomplete or merely potential 'actor' on the world scene. Even among the proponents there are different interpretations about the nature of the EU's foreign policy and 'actorness'. As a result, the EU is perceived as an ambiguous polity (actor) and its foreign policy profile appears to be a moving target.

This collection aims to provide an insight into the EU's role in the world and as a global actor. It takes as its point of departure the fact that during the last decade there has been an increasing emphasis within the EU on interregionalism (region-to-region relations) as a foundation for its external policies. This foreign policy 'doctrine' is deeply rooted in the European Commission and has been expressed many times by a number of leading politicians and policy-makers during the last decade, albeit not always in the same way. As early as 1990 the then German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, stated, with reference to interregionalism, that "the path of the political dialogue and economic cooperation embarked upon by the EC in a spirit of true partnership is proving to be the path of the future" (Edwards & Regelsberger 1990, vii-viii). More recently, in September 2001 an interregional model was proposed by the Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, then President of the European Council, who suggested that the current G8 should be replaced by a G8 based on more adequate regional representation: "... we need to create a forum where the leading continental partnerships can all speak on an equal footing: the European Union, the African Union, the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), etc."¹

Promoting and developing regional integration is a key feature of the relations between the EU and other regions in many parts of the world. The most developed relationship in Latin America is with Mercosur. The EU-Mercosur Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement is seen as a step towards an Interregional Association Agreement and a strengthened interregional partnership between the EU and Mercosur (European Commission 1996).

In Asia, the EU is engaged in strong interregional relations with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and also offers support for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) focused on trade integration among South Asian countries. The EU's exchanges with ASEAN gave birth to a new institutional framework of interregional multidimensional relations with the creation of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996. The historical ASEM 5 Summit held in Hanoi in October

2004 marked the enlargement of ASEM from 26 to 39 partners through the accession of the ten new EU member states and three new countries from ASEAN that were not yet part of the process: Cambodia, Laos and Burma/Myanmar.

The EU has clearly acknowledged the link between regional integration and development in its policy towards the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries by including regional integration among the three focal priorities for poverty reduction mentioned in the Cotonou Agreement. As stated in article 28 of the Agreement: "Cooperation shall provide effective assistance to achieve the objectives and priorities which the ACP States have set themselves in the context of regional and sub-regional cooperation and integration, including interregional and intra-ACP cooperation".² Given that the ACP framework comprises countries widely dispersed geographically, the EU has also developed more specific interregional partnerships with Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean under the auspices of the Cotonou Agreement.

Thus, the EU is becoming the hub of a large number of interregional arrangements which, in turn, are strengthening its own regionalist ideology. Promoting regional and interregional relations not only justifies and enhances the EU's own existence and efficiency as an 'actor'; the strategy also promotes the legitimacy and status of other regions. This, in turn, promotes further crosscutting regionalism and interregionalism around the world. Most of these EU-promoted interregional arrangements encompass not only trade and economic relations but also political dialogue, development cooperation, cultural relations and security cooperation. The ambition of the EU is also to formalise as well as institutionalise the relations between two regional bodies (now often referred to as 'partnerships') but, for pragmatic reasons, the agreements with different counterpart regions show a "bewildering variety" (Hettne 2005).

The study of interregionalism is underrepresented in the academic debate and we simply do not know enough when and why interregionalism occurs and what it is actually an instance of. There is a pressing need to learn more about the 'why' and the 'hows' of interregionalism in the EU's foreign policy. This collection of studies is an attempt to provide more systematic and comparative research on this topic.

2. Purpose of the Studies

The overall aim of this collection of studies is to assess the EU as a global actor, with particular attention given to the role of interregionalism in its foreign policies towards some of the most important regions around the world: Africa, Asia, South America, North America and Eastern and Central Europe.

One of the central ambitions is to assess whether there is an increasing tendency of regions to assume a stronger role on the world scene and gain in 'actorness'. Our concern is first and foremost with the EU, but the degree of actorness of counterpart regions is also relevant. What brings actorness and interregionalism together is the fact that, when regions assume actorness, a

need will necessarily also arise for more organised contacts between the regions, i.e., interregionalism.

A host of other intriguing questions unfolds as one starts to think about this general purpose. Is it plausible to speak of an EU foreign policy 'doctrine' of interregionalism at all? Is interregionalism really a crucial ingredient of the EU's foreign policy? Is the EU pursuing interregionalism only towards particular regions and not towards others? Is interregionalism more prevalent in some sectors and aspects of foreign policy than in others? In order to understand interregionalism we must, of course, look beyond the EU itself. To what extent does interregionalism depend on the counterpart 'region' and, particularly, its coherence?

A crucial question is to understand and explain why (or why not) interregionalism is being pursued. What are the interests and motives that make interregionalism happen? Does interregionalism occur as a result of power politics and geo-strategic (self-)interest? Or should we understand it as resulting from the effort to build a more 'just' world on the basis of core liberal internationalist values and ideas, such as democracy, development and human rights, which are often stated in the EU's official rhetoric? Or should interregionalism perhaps be explained in terms of social constructivism where norms and identities are seen as crucial components in the making of foreign policy and region-to-region relations? If so, then we can expect interregionalism to result from the projection of the EU's self on the other, or from EU attempts to act as a role model (or counter-model) for other regions.

Closely related to this question is another: who are the driving actors in the EU's foreign policy process and in the proposed interregionalism? Are they the EU's central institutions, national actors, policy experts, or perhaps non-state actors and interest groups? Of particular theoretical significance is the question whether the EU's foreign policy is a reflection of the so-called 'community interest' or intergovernmental bargaining, or just another means for pursuing conventional national foreign policy interests. Another way to frame this question is to ask where power lies in the making of the EU's foreign policy.

Assessing interregionalism raises important questions regarding world order and global governance. What are the implications of interregionalism for the patterns of foreign policy and world order? Does the EU try to construct regions and interregional partnerships in order to deal with regions through interregionalism, rather than the old-style (bilateral) state-to-state foreign policy relations? Does interregionalism imply a shift from a world order based on nation-states towards one based on regions and interregional relations? How does interregionalism relate to bilateralism? Does the EU have suitable partners to engage in interregional relations? Is interregionalism challenging or strengthening multilateralism?

These questions are both comprehensive and complex. Our starting position is that no single theory can provide satisfactory answers to all the questions. There is a host of different theories and approaches that are helpful in explaining and understanding European integration and the EU's foreign policies. To some extent we can expect that the dominant theoretical

frameworks, such as realism and liberalism, will make sense of these issues. However, we can also expect constructivism and more critical theoretical perspectives to provide complementary answers, for instance on the role of norms, identities and power relations in these processes. There is a need to clarify, revise and also, to some extent, to generate new theory in order to make sense of the interregional phenomenon, as well as the EU as a global actor. Since the study of interregionalism is at such an early stage of development we have not tried to impose a single or uniform theoretical framework for the individual case studies but, rather, tried to encourage the authors to engage in creative theorizing.

Several authors in this collection employ, in their own manner, a combination of different theoretical approaches in their studies (often a combination of realist and liberal perspectives). For instance, Farrell (EU–Africa) sets a realist against a liberal perspective, whereas Aggarwal and Fogarty (EU–North America) derive and test several hypotheses from complementary strands of liberal, realist and constructivist literature. Julie Gilson’s study of EU–Asia relations is rather different, in that she consistently employs a social constructivist analysis.

3. The Emergence of Interregionalism: a Historical Perspective

In order to understand the present and the future we first need to briefly look into history. Most observers agree that the nation–state is the main constitutive element of the modern international political system. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) is a significant turning point in history. It ended the Thirty Years War in Europe and marked the formal beginning of the nation–state and of what is often referred to as the Westphalian system. “It grew out of the power of the king, and resulted in the sovereign, territorial state, which in turn implied the end of local power, as well as continental all–European political and economic structures” (Hettne 2004, 2). In this system the nation–state is not only responsible for internal order and external defence, but also for the welfare of its citizens and their civic engagement. This system represents something deeper than simply a dominance of sovereign, territorial states in international relations.

The Westphalian order emerged in Europe, but has gradually expanded over the globe. The nation–states in the Westphalian system were certainly not isolated from the external world. A dense pattern of international cooperation and regimes emerged that governed the relations between states, such as air traffic control and trade. The point is that these relations were based on state–to–state relations and did not challenge, but strengthened, the Westphalian system as such.

*Globalisation, the Nation–state and the Transformation of Westphalia*³

Today the Westphalian system is challenged and transformed by a number of forces and developments but also, paradoxically, reinforced by them. The most important changes contributing to ‘moving beyond Westphalia’ are

perhaps the changing nature of its constitutive unit, the sovereign state, in combination with what is conventionally referred to as globalisation.

Globalisation is an elusive concept that signifies an ongoing process of structural transformation with worldwide implications. At the heart of the phenomenon is an ever-changing pattern of relations in time and space, which is a consequence of a global intensification of political, economic, social and communication linkages that have fundamentally altered the nature of social interactions (Harvey 1990). The process of globalisation can be seen to have reached a qualitatively new stage in the post-Cold War era. Economic interdependence was made possible by the political stability after the Second World War and then increased during the Cold War. Since then, globalisation has further intensified, which further reinforces the transformation beyond Westphalia.

The idea of globalism has as its ideological core the growth of a world market, increasingly penetrating and dominating 'national' economies which, in the process, are bound to lose some of their 'nationness'. Globalists consider too much government to be a systemic fault. Good governance is thus defined as less government. In accepting this ideology, the state becomes the disciplining spokesman of global economic forces, rather than the protector against these forces, which is the classical task of mercantilist nation-building. This historical retreat from its Westphalian functions also implies a dramatically changed relationship between the state and civil society and, in particular a tendency for the state to become increasingly alienated from civil society. In this process of change, legitimacy, loyalty, identity, function and even sovereignty are transferred up or down in the system, to political entities other than the state — i.e., to macro-polities or micro-polities. This makes it necessary to transcend the conventional obsession with the nation-state as the dominant political unit in the global system and instead think in terms of a more complex, multilevel political structure, in which the state assumes different functions. In the era of globalisation, new, larger political structures beyond the 'state' are obviously needed. In fact, the resurrection of regionalism is intimately tied to the transformation of the nation-state as well as globalisation.

Regionalism and the Emergence of Interregionalism

Although interregionalism should be seen as a distinct phenomenon, it cannot be understood in total isolation from regionalism. With regard to the latter, it is commonplace to refer to successive waves of regionalism or regional integration. Many observers speak about two main 'waves' of regionalism: the processes emerging after the end of the Second World War and extending until the mid-1970s and those since the mid-1980s (Schulz *et al.* 2001).⁴

In order to avoid the confusion that often arises as a result of mixing temporal, empirical and theoretical notions of 'old' and 'new' regionalisms, we propose the term 'generations' of regionalism rather than 'waves'. The label 'generation' refers to empirical qualities and has nothing to do with the "theories of new regionalism" (Söderbaum 2004; Söderbaum & Shaw 2003).