UNU-CRIS Occasional Papers

0-2005/15

Regionalism as a Political Vision

(Possibilities and limits of the global approach to the issues of regional integration)

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Introduction

If one looks to the world from an international relations' perspective, it is tempting to analyse the present situation in terms of a clash between the advocates of multilateralism and those that foster bilateralism. The former will refer to globalisation and interdependency as processes that call for more global governance and thus more multilateralism. As Keohane once noted, '*interdependence and the lack of governance, when combined, make a deadly mixture*' [i]. The latter will point to the many deficiencies of the current multilateral system and argue that (bilateral) 'coalitions of the willing 'between like-minded' are the way forward. There might, however, be a third way that combines global multilateralism with local bilateralism. In this paper I will advocate that regionalism might be such a third way and that Europe has a major role to play in advancing global governance and that regionalism can contribute to creating a more secure and just world-order.

Challenges to global governance

Globalisation challenges the current world-order in two ways. First, it dramatically decreases the ability of individual sovereign states to run their internal affairs without taking into account what is happening in the rest of the world. Secondly, it puts increasing strains on multilateralism as a tool to manage the public goods and "bads" that are generated through the forces of globalisation. As a result, notwithstanding the potentials of globalisation, people and countries are not equally sharing the benefits [ii].

Debates on globalization raise questions regarding the appropriate political response for dealing with both its negative and positive effects. One of the fundamental questions is at what level of governance action should be situated. National and local authorities can take actions, but – as is often the case – these authorities are limited in their ability to tackle global and, thus, transnational problems. On the other hand, there are global worldwide institutions, such as the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. But since the end of the Cold War, the global organizations has been confronted with a whole set of global problems such that the "United Nations System is in greater and more comprehensive demand than ever before. In some areas, it is stretched to the limits of its capacity" [iii]. Such global challenges comprise: the spread of ethnic wars and low-intensity conflicts, the rapid population growth, the

increase in the economic imbalance between North and South and the deepening of poverty, the problem of food security and environmental degradation.

The United Nations was founded in 1945 in an attempt to create a multilateral world forum where sovereign states can clear up differing opinions, and where common actions about peace and development can be stimulated. Today, however, the world is dramatically different from that of the post-World War II period in which the United Nations was founded. First of all, the geopolitical stability of that system disappeared with the end of the cold war. Secondly, a lot more countries are now members of the United Nations than used to be the case (from the original 51 members, to 191 today), which means that the functioning of the General Assembly is not getting easier. Thirdly, states now have to share their hegemony on governance and their capacity to regulate economic transformation more and more with local governments, supranational groupings and non-governmental actors. And, finally, as shown in the Iraqi crisis, not all states seem to accept multilateralism as the dominant principle on which the world order has to be based.

So, how should the United Nations deal with globalization? Should we stick to the old model of a club of nations? Or should one search for alternative models in which other actors, such as regional organizations, can play a role?

The developments of Regionalism

Regional organisations have proliferated over the past few decades to a worldwide phenomenon. But this growth in number and geographical coverage is also matched by an increased diversity in the 'substance' or 'content' of integration. There is a wide spectrum of regional processes nowadays, with organisations belonging to different 'generations' of regional integration cohabiting next to each other. Regional integration has acquired several meanings as a process of interacting influences that have both a historic and geographical dimension.

The 'first generation' of regional integration was based upon the idea of a linear process of economic integration involving the combination of separate (national) economies into larger economic regions. This process begins with a free trade area - in which states agree to remove all custom duties and quotas on trade passing between them, keeping however the right to determine unilaterally the level of custom duties on imports coming from outside the area - and moves through successive stages of integration (customs union, common market) until it reaches the point of an economic union.[iv] Mattli defines such economic integration as "the voluntary linking in the economic domain of two or more formerly independent states to the extent that authority over key areas of domestic regulation and policy is shifted to the supranational level"[v], underlining therefore the transnational aspect of the new economic ties created.

The classical example of this linear evolution of economic integration is offered by the evolution of Western Europe after WWII: the creation of the European Economic Community with the Treaty of Rome in 1957 removing the tariffs and quotas on intra-EEC trade, the achievement of a Customs Union in 1968 with the establishment of a common external tariff (CET), the creation of a Single European Market in the mid-

1980s eliminating the barriers still existing to trade and the establishment of the 'four freedoms' of circulation (persons, goods, services and capital). The economic union is in the process of being completed following the creation of the single currency, although, even in the EU, unification is still needed in important fields such as fiscal policy. Nevertheless, there are other numerous examples worldwide of first generation regional integration placed at different stages of the afore-mentioned four-level spectrum. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the European market integration became trigger for the creation of free trade areas and common markets in Africa (CEAO, WAEC, SADCC, SACU), and the Americas (CARICOM, Andean Free Trade Area, CACM).

First generation regional integration is still nowadays a booming phenomenon and has expanded its geographical scope to all the continents of the world. According to the WTO Committee on Regional Trade Agreements, by July 2003, only three WTO members (Macau China, Mongolia and Chinese Taipei) were not yet parties to such agreements. By May 2003, over 265 had been notified to the WTO (and its predecessor, GATT). Of these, 138 were notified after the WTO was created in January 1995. Over 190 are currently in force; another 60 are believed to be operational although not yet notified. Judging by the number of agreements under negotiation, the total number of regional trade agreements could well approach 300 by 2006.[vi]

Although a purely economic process, the original intentions behind first generation regional agreements can also be **political**. This is the case with the predecessors of the European Union: it is not generally remembered today that originally, a principal impulse to West European integration was the political motive of avoiding another major war in Europe. Economic unification was seen as a means of securing European peace. When French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman announced his famous plan to unify Europe's coal and steel markets in 1950, he said that the ECSC would make war between France and Germany not just unthinkable but materially impossible.[3] With their economies integrated, the major European powers would lack the means to wage war against one another. A similar security motif played also in 1990 when the idea of a monetary union was decided. This was certainly linked to concerns about the German unification. For Miterrand it was absolutely necessary to accompany the unification by a deeper integration in order to neutralise the potential danger of the enlarged Germany.[vii]

The development of the **political** dimension is nevertheless the main characteristic of 'second generation' regional integration, which coincides with what is generally referred to as '*new regionalism*': a "multidimensional form of integration which includes economic, political, social and cultural aspects and thus goes far beyond the goal of creating region-based free trade regimes or security alliances. Rather, the political ambition of establishing regional coherence and identity seems to be of primary importance"[viii]. 'New regionalism' is based on the idea that one cannot isolate trade and economy from the rest of society: integration can also imply **non-economic matters** such as justice, security, culture.

Second generation regional integration has several important characteristics:
    a) deep economic integration plus political elements;
    b) multi-level governance;
    c) devolution within states;

d) strong international legal framework;
e) cooperation along many dimensions.

'New regionalism' brings with it a new concept of **regional governance** that has to be seen as something that emerges out of interplay between two organising forces that shape all policy issues: integration and disintegration. The concept of integration refers to a process in which units move from a condition of total or partial isolation towards a complete or partial unification. Applied to the interaction between independent sovereign states, the concept refers to a process of complex social transformations, which may or may not imply some kind of permanent institutional structure or mutual cooperation. Integration between sovereign states is a process of large-scale territorial differentiation characterised by the progressive lowering of internal boundaries and the slow raising of new external boundaries. As a result, the volume of flows – of people, goods, services, capital etc. – between the integrating actors becomes proportionately more compared to their total global transactions. Regional integration thus refers to a process of complex social transformation that is characterised by the intensification of relations between independent sovereign states and that gives rise to some kind of structure for mutual cooperation based on recurring and stable patterns of behaviour, that is, to *institutionalisation*.

Especially in Europe, with on the one hand the processes of Europeanisation of policy and on the other hand the progressive upgrading of the microregional level in both national and European policy processes, there is now a wide consensus that governance is not limited to the level of the state. A novel concept has been advanced, that of multilevel governance in order to emphasise power-sharing between different levels of government with "… no centre of accumulated authority. Instead, variable combinations of governments on multiple layers of authority – European, national, and subnational – form policy networks for collaboration. The relations are characterised by mutual interdependence on each other's resources, not by competition for scarce resources".[ix] Such multilevel governance can be defined as 'the dispersion of authoritative decision-making across multiple territorial levels'.[x] From this perspective, European integration is a polity-creating process in which authority and policy-making influence are shared across multiple levels of government – subnational, national and supranational.

The European Union is the most developed case of second generation integration. It rests upon the principles of pooled sovereignty and the creation of a series of institutions, including a system of political representation. The EU is exemplar of that new regionalism as it has managed to develop a model of integration that incorporates political elements in a deep economic integration. What is happening in Europe is quite innovative: we now have a complex multi-level governance system with a deep co-operation between states, with firm devolution of power within states and a strong international legal framework. This has created a political model that challenges assumptions about governance all over the world. Of course, European integration cannot be seen as the 'model' for the rest of the world. But the underlying idea of **multi-dimensional regional integration** that implies co-operation along a number of different dimensions such as culture, politics, security, economics and diplomacy deserves to be taken serious in political and economic efforts to achieve stability and prosperity in **all the regions of the world**.

This is strongly proven by the success of the 'new regionalism' model of governance outside of Europe. Indeed, second generation regional integration has spread during the last two decades on the other continents through the creation of new organisations or the upgrading of previously existing regional economic organisations. Examples of 'new regionalism' comprise the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the African continent; the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on the Asian continent; MERCOSUR, the Andean Community (CAN) and CARICOM in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Of outmost importance, one of the main functions of the model of governance brought about by new regionalism which is particularly visible outside of Europe is **the promotion of development**, going much beyond the purely economic benefits of "first generation" regional integration: "the new regionalism is more political than economic, and the economic approach is much broader than the exchange of goods. Its approach to free trade is cautious, far from autarchic but more selective in its external relations and careful to see to the interests of the region as a whole. Such interests include wider economic issues such as infrastructural development, industrial policy, sustainable resources, management and so on".[xi] As underlined by Mistry (2000)[xii], while first generation free trade areas, customs unions and preferential trade areas have generated only limited tangible or unequally shared benefits in terms of economic and broader development of the member states, second generation regional integration agreements (RIAs) between developing countries have the potential to bring development quantified in both economic and *non-economic* terms, if these agreements are coherently designed and implemented. This important role played by "new regionalism" for developing countries as a tool for economic development has been widely analyzed in recent academic literature[xiii] and acknowledged by the global institutions such as the World Bank[xiv] and UNCTAD.[xv]

Second generation regional integration is therefore a multi-faceted phenomenon, which touches a much wider number of policies than the 'old trade-based regionalism' did. At the same time, the "new regionalism" seems to have positive effects not only on the internal governance of a specific region, but has been already pointed by authors as able to promote certain "world values" as security, development, ecological sustainability, better than globalism.[xvi]

The interesting thing about second generation integration is that it brings some 'statehood' properties to the regional, supranational level. As such, regions can become actors in the international arena as well. If regions are taking up that role, one can speak of a **third generation** of regional integration.[xvii] Here a regional organisation becomes a global actor that seeks to find its place in the international relations arena. There is evidence that the European Union is trying to move from 2nd to 3rd generation integration. And in doing so, Europe seems also to promote its own form of regionalism. The question now is how second and third generation regional integration challenge global governance…

Enhancing Global Governance through Regional Integration: Possibilities and Challenges

Right from its origins, the UN has struggled with the question of what place supranational regional organizations should and could take in achieving the UN goals. On the one hand, there is the position that regionalism blocks the necessary global and universal approach needed to solve the global problems of today. On the other hand, there is the position that regionalism can serve in realizing the overall UN goals. In my view, the latter position is indeed the one to be defended if one believes that multilateralism has to be the main organizing principle of the world order. New regionalism can play a major role in providing the necessary legitimacy for multilateralism, as it is a mechanism that (i) allows small countries to have a voice next to large countries and (ii) allows poor countries to integrate more easily in the world economy. Also, regionalism can be a way of harnessing the larger countries (superpowers) to recognize their responsibility in playing a constructive role in their region.

The United Nations since its creation has been based exclusively on state membership. Yet geographical groupings are pervasive to the organisation and functioning of the UN system, from the composition of the Security Council, Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Commission to the appointment of personnel at all levels. Many regional groupings function as a caucus within the UN. There are also the regional commissions and economic regional sub-structures set up by the UN. Then there are the non-UN regional organisations that have obtained observer status within the UN. The existence of all these structures corroborates the claim that a regional philosophy, far from being incompatible with UN goals, is integral to the organisation.

New regionalism is about institution-building at the level of regions, and it is my belief that such regional integration can be simultaneously a "building block" towards a worldwide-globalized open economy as well as a "dike" that protects countries from the negative aspects of globalization. As already underlined before, 'new regionalism' has a lot of potential benefits for developing countries. Not only can it contribute to a smooth and gradual integration in the world economy and strengthen their position in WTO, it also provides a framework for public investments at a regional scale. But, for this to happen, any regional integration initiative needs to prove its "added value" by taking into account at least the following eight issues. It should:
- contribute to peace and security in the region;
- contribute to the creation of an appropriate enabling environment for private sector development;
- strengthen trade integration in the region;
- develop strong public sector institutions and good governance;
- reduce social exclusion and foster an inclusive civil society;
- develop infrastructure programmes in support of economic growth and regional integration;
- build environment programmes at the regional level; and
- strengthen the region's interaction with other regions in the world.

If the answer is regionalism, then a mechanism needs to be found that enables small countries – developing countries as well as "superpowers" – to exercise equal weight

in decision-making processes. Belgian Prime Minister Verhofstadt recently formulated a proposal for such a mechanism: his idea is to convert the G8 into a "network of the big regional continental organizations." In that framework, Verhofstadt is thinking about a club of regional groupings, such as the European Union, Mercosur, ASEAN, etc. In such a club, the African Union could have the same weight as, for example, NAFTA. And each regional grouping should act as a forum to balance small and big countries' interests. As one can imagine, there are lots of critical and practical objections to such a proposal, such as: Who is going to stipulate who can become member of what club? Will the small countries within each of these regional groupings have enough say? Will any alliances be created that again contain the classical North-South contradictions? However, the idea of Verhofstadt deserves to be taken seriously, as it corresponds to the reality of today – namely, that regional organizations are becoming more and more important. But, in my opinion, it is the United Nations rather than the G8 that should become the forum in which the world regions can enter into dialogue with one another.

My proposal, thus, is to think about a system in which the existing regional actors, such as the European Union, become the building stones of a United Nations forum. This entirely corresponds with what has been said in the still very worthwhile report "Our Global Neighbourhood" of the United Nations Commission on Global Governance – namely, that the challenge for the development of a good working system of "global governance" consists in enforcing each other's global and macroregional regulations: "*Decentralization, delegation and cooperation with regional organs can lighten the burden of global organizations, while generating a deeper sense of participation in a common effort.*"

Leonard (2005)[ixviii] advanced the idea that Europe's goal should be "to create a Union of Unions that brings (the) regional organisations together" into a 'Community of Regional Entities' that would serve as the primary coordinating body of the UN. Such a vision seems to be difficult to realise, but as mentioned in Van Langenhove (2004)[xix], realising a multi-regional world order is not utopian, and it starts from today's reality that, next to nations, world regions are becoming increasingly important tools for global governance.

Already in 1992 the Secretary General's report *An Agenda for Peace* had called for a greater involvement of regional organisations in the UN activities regarding peace and security. Both the '*Agenda for Peace*' and the '*Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*' highlighted the advantages and potential for the division of labour in using the regional arrangements for the different mechanisms like preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding. Since then, a formal cooperation between regional organisations and the UN has also started developing at the initiative of the UN Secretary-General, who has convened in the period 1993-2005 six 'high-level meetings' with regional organisations involved in security matters from all the continents (EU, NATO, ECOWAS, OSCE, CIS, OIC, ASEAN, African Union, and the League of Arab States). The discussions have focussed on challenges to international peace and security, the role of regional organisations in peace-building activities and practical measures to promote greater coordination and cooperation in peacekeeping and peace-building.

As stated by the UN Secretary-General Koffi Anan, the year 2005 represents a 'fork in the road' on the path towards UN reform. The 6th High-Level Meeting between the UN Secretary-General and Regional Organisations, organised on 25-26th of July 2005,

has considerably brought forward the dialogue between the UN Secretary-General Koffi Anan and 22 regional organizations. The UN Secretary General stated at this occasion that strengthening the UN relationship with regional and other intergovernmental organisations was a critical part of the effort to reform the UN. The *Joint Statement* issued at the end of the meeting concluded that a more structured relationship between the UN and regional and other intergovernmental organisations needs to be developed "creating a truly interlocking system that guarantees greater coordination in both policy and action. This partnership should build on the comparative strengths of each organization".[xx] To that end, a number of specific organisational measures were put forward, such as creating a Standing Committee and setting future meetings -now on an annual basis – to coincide with the meetings that the Security Council holds with regional organisations. In order to increase co-ordination, it was decided to identify one high-level official in each organisation for the purpose of liaising with the United Nations and with one another.

Improved cooperation between the UN and regional organisations was also a theme of the 2005 World Summit. World leaders endorsed the above *Joint Statement* and also agreed to increase involvement of regional organisations in the work of the Security Council. Romania has recently played an important role as member of the Security Council. In July 2004 and October 2005 it has organised meetings of the Security Council with regional organisations. In October 2005, a resolution was endorsed[xxi] [S/RES/1631(2005)] concomitantly pointing in the direction of further developing the idea of a regional-global security complex. The Council noted the growing contribution of regional and subregional organisations for international peace and security and recognized the need to support capacity-building and cooperation at regional and subregional level in this area, namely in conflict prevention, peaceful settlement of disputes, peacekeeping, crisis management, post-conflict stabilization, and also on the areas of counter-terrorism and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. These developments show that regionalism is indeed finding its way in the theatre of international relations and multilateralism.[xxii]

Conclusions

Regionalism *is* a political vision that can be an answer to globalisation. It comprises first and for all an economic vision, namely that economic integration is beneficial. This implies opening up of borders to the neighbours and joining forces with the other members of a regional group to compete at a global level. Secondly, it contains a vision of political and social integration. The deeper an economic integration between neighbours goes, the more need there is to establish integration in other sectors of society. And thirdly, there is emerging a vision about a global world order that has a place for regionalism. This vision starts from the premise that the present world order (based upon sovereign states and multilevel integration) is not optimal to deal with globalisation and global threats. The dream behind this vision is to use regionalism as a tool to establish a new global balance of power between the small and big countries of the world and between the rich and poor countries.

Europe can and should show the way in realising such a vision. Notwithstanding the present stagnation in the deepening/widening process is still a fantastic laboratory of

integration. As such it can serve as a benchmark for other regions in the world and perhaps it should also take up more the role of a mentor as well.

Finally, I want to point to three challenges that need to be dealt with in order to further realise regionalism as a political vision.

The first challenge has to do with the uneven spread of regionalism across the world. Each region of the world has at present several regional organisations which can be classified under the categories presented above, and most countries belong to multiple regional organisations. But, while looking at the world map, one can easily notice that regionalism is still an *uneven* phenomenon: regional organisations are particularly prominent in Europe, Africa and the Americas. It is also in these regions that the average number of regional organisations membership per country, or what we might call *regional intensity*, is the highest. So, on the one hand there is need for a rationalisation of regional actors. On the other hand much region building is still necessary.

The second challenge relates to multilateralism. At present, regional organisations have still a limited place in the multilateral organisations. As mentioned before, interesting developments are taking place, especially in the field of security, but much more is needed. In my view the success of any UN reform will heavily depend upon the extent to which it allows for regions to be actors next to states.

The third challenge is perhaps the most important one. It is about the popular support regionalism has. At present we see that everywhere in the world globalisation is questioned and how people fear the consequences of globalisation on their jobs. All too often regionalism is experienced as a manifestation of globalisation while it can do be seen as a dyke that protects against the 'dark side' of globalisation. But the experience in Europe with the referenda on the Constitution has shown that a majority of people has problems with the European integration. This is by the way not that new. Remember the referendum in France on the Maastricht Treaty: 49 % of the people voted against. It is however interesting to see that the recent protest against the FTAA was directed not against regionalism as such. It was against an unbalanced North-South integration. In any case, the idea of a multi-regional world order will only be feasible if supported and promoted by civil society. And for that to happen politicians will have to speak up for regionalism.

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Notes

[i] R. Keohane, 'Governance in a Partially Globalised World' (2001) 95/1 *American Political Science Review*, pp. 1-13

[ii] see World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization Report, A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All, ILO, February 2004 (http://www.ilo.org/public/english/fairglobalization/).

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[vi] WTO Committee on Regional Trade Agreements, *Regionalism: Friends or Rivals*, http://www.wto. org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/bey1_e.htm

[vii] See the verbatim accounts of the discussion between Miterrand and Kohl in Jacques Attali (2005). *C'était François Miterrand*. Paris: Fayard.

[viii] B. Hettne, 'The New Regionalism: A Prologue', in: B. Hettne, A. Inotai and O. Sunkel, ed. by, *Globalism and the New Regionalism*, Macmillan, London, 1999, p.xvi.

[ix] L. Hooghe, ed., Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi-Level Governance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 18.

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[xiii] See for instance B. Hettne, A. Inotai & O. Sunkel (ed. by) The New Regionalism and the Future of Security and Development (London: Macmillan, 2000) and B. Hettne, A. Inotai & O. Sunkel (ed. by) Comparing regionalisms : implications for global development (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[xiv] M. Schiff and A. L. Winters, *Regional Integration and Development* (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2003).

[xv] L. Cernat, "Assessing South-South integration: same issues, many metrics" *Policy Issues in International Trade and Commodities Study Series*, no. 21 (Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2003):17.

[xvi] B. Hettne, "The New Regionalism," xvi.

[xvii] L. Van Langenhove and A. C. Costea "The EU as a Global Actor from a New Regionalism Perspective", in: *Managing a Multilevel Foreign Policy: The EU in International Affairs,* edited by P. Foradori, P. Rosa and R. Scartezzini (Lexington Books, in press).

[xviii] M. Leonard, *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), 142.

[xix] L. Van Langenhove, "Towards a Multiregionalism World Order", *UN Chronicle* XLI, no. 3, (September-November 2004): 12-13.

[xx] Joint Statement by Participants in the Sixth High-Level Meeting between the United Nations and Regional and other Intergovernmental Organizations, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 25-26 July 2005.

[xxi] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1631 (2005) Adopted by the Security Council at its 5282nd meeting, on 17 October 2005, on the Cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in maintaining international peace and security, S/RES/1631(2005), http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/556/42/PDF/ N0555642.pdf?OpenElement

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