

Declining Regionalization in the Absence of U.S. Dominance

ABD Hakimiyeti Eksikliğinde Bölgeselciliğin Gerilemesi

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Abstract

Regionalization has been an important component within the international relations that typically is associated with the idea of globalization. Globalization has been an important idea for reasons of global peace and stability. However, globalization efforts could only take off right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then, international organizations such as the United Nations, regional organizations such as the NATO have been struggling to keep the ideal of globalization intact. Other regional organizations in Asia and Africa have especially been wary of external interventions and together with the failures regarding genocides and civil wars in Ruanda, Srebrenitsa and the war in Ukraine and the occupation and destruction of Gaza have demonstrated that neither the UN, NATO or the International Criminal Courts have been successful in upholding international law, global peace and economic stability. These have been causes for degradation and distrust in one global world. Instead, these experiences have been furthering the belief that international regionalization has been failing, with direct consequences for modernization and democratization.

Keywords: Regional Organizations, Functionalism, Neo-functionalism, Intergovernmentalism

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Özet

Bölgeselleşme, genellikle küreselleşme fikriyle ilişkilendirilen uluslararası ilişkilerde önemli bir bileşen olmuştur. Küreselleşme, küresel barış ve istikrar açısından önemli bir fikir olmuştur. Ancak, küreselleşme çabaları yalnızca Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşünden hemen sonra ivme kazanabilmiştir. O zamandan beri Birleşmiş Milletler gibi uluslararası örgütler, NATO gibi bölgesel örgütler, küreselleşme idealini korumak için mücadele etmektedir. Asya ve Afrika'daki diğer bölgesel örgütler özellikle dış müdahalelere karşı temkinli olmuş ve Ruanda'daki soykırım, Srebrenitsa'daki katliam, Ukrayna'daki savaş ve Gazze'nin işgali ve yıkımı, Lübnan'a saldırılar gibi olaylar Birleşmiş Milletler, NATO veya Uluslararası Ceza Mahkemeleri'nin uluslararası hukuku, küresel barışı ve ekonomik istikrarı korumada başarılı olamadığını göstermektedir. Bu durum, küresel bir dünyaya olan güvenin ve inancın zayıflamasına neden olmuştur. Bunun yerine, bu deneyimler uluslararası bölgeselleşmenin başarısız olduğu ve bunun modernleşme ve demokratikleşme üzerinde doğrudan etkileri olduğu inancını pekiştirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bölgesel kuruluşlar, Fonksiyonalizm, Neo-fonksiyonalizm, Hükümetlerarasıcılık

Introduction

With the transition from *old regionalism* into *new regionalism* since the nineties (Burfisher et al., 2004) the world has been witnessing an upsurge of regionalisation that was supposed to influence regional modernization, globalization and democratization (MacLeod, 2001). Regionalization that came about right after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Valuev, 2000), stood very much in light of further integration of sovereign states emulating liberal democratic values, such as human rights, adherence to international law, international commerce, and the spread of democracy for the citizens of the world. Literature demonstrates that regional integration has not been a uniform process and each regional organization has had its own progression and ideas about their regional alliances (Krapohl et al., 2017). As a counter example the European Union has had a longer run on regionalisation where Europe was primarily focused on the prevention of another new devastating conflict on the mainland. The European vision adhered by visionaries such as Robert Schuman was to unite the European nations in commerce creating interdependence and solidarity under a single continental identity (Kotlowski, 2000). Contrary to this image the African Union or the ASEAN

preferred regional cooperation rather than integration to prevent new forms of colonialism and external intervention in their newly found independence (Söderbaum, 2009).

One criticism regarding regionalization is that the available theoretical frames such as functionalism, neo-functionalism or liberal intergovernmentalism are equipped to explain Western experiences, yet inadequately developed to understand non-Western regionalization (Krapohl et al., 2017). Only the European Union is considered to qualify being supranational as European nations are the only ones that were able to delegate national jurisdiction to EU-institutions. While the EU institutionalization is regarded to be strong and influential, other regional organizations share the burden being considered as to be weak holding on to their national sovereignties. The European Union in this respect has gone through phases starting with economic cooperation and working towards political integration (Balassa, 2013). The process started during the fifties with economic cooperation, the European Coal and Steel Cooperation (ECSC) and further developed regional functions into integration and delegation of sovereignty to supranational institutions that ascertain commitment to established supranational laws. What started as an economic cooperation slowly but gradually transformed into a political union with economic, political, social, cultural, scientific policy areas and identities (Wendt, 1999).

As the European Union (EU) is considered to be the most integrated regional *model* (Hix & Høyland, 2022), it has undeniably prompted scholars to develop EU-specific theoretical frameworks to elucidate upon its successes. Within this discourse, considerable attention was devoted to exploring the relationship between regional and international organizations (Rosamond, 2000, p. 14). For Rosamond variations among regional organizations in terms of their integrative potential are unmistakably evident, highlighting that not all organizations worldwide share the same level of ambition. In this line of thought, one may deduce that not all regional organizations can and will fit in such an ideal depiction. However, it must be noted that almost all countries in the world are in some form become members of regional organizations. Almost all countries in the world are members of the United Nations and most regional organizations are members to the United Nations. The UN as an international organization does not possess any armed forces for when an intervention in a regional conflict is required (Halderman, 1962). This function is solely based on the member regional organizations as these organizations do not only have direct interest in a regional threat that could destabilize the region, but these regional organizations also have local knowledge regarding how to proceed with a possible ground intervention (Barca et al., 2012). In most UN interventions are acknowledged as ineffective. At the time of writing this article, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has emphasized the necessity for the European Union to further invest in its military presence and defence capabilities (Pugnet, 2024). The war in Ukraine continues with heavy

casualties. Meanwhile, the occupation and brutal killings of Gazans persist, with civilian casualties reaching 36,000 ('Special Coordinator, Stressing "All Sides Must Urgently Change Course", Appeals to Security Council for Support of Gaza's Political Future', 2024).

Theoretical Debate

In the field of European studies, the concept of *integration* primarily refers to the political component and with this, one finds oneself in an immediate discussion. This idea of integration has an immediate association to primarily democratization due to political objectives such human rights. Yet, not all debates are that simple, as the famous Nobel prize winner Milton Friedman prioritizes *economic freedom* (Friedman, 2002) to be the primary necessity even for all political and civic freedoms. For Milton it is true that economic freedoms can enable political freedoms, while the opposite is not true. Milton's hypothesis has some truth to it as the EU started off as the European Economic Community (EEC) for steel and coal trade and grew further into a political union (Mikesell, 1958). After this brief remark that demonstrates the complex nature of such discussions, I now will focus on mapping out IR-theories that correspond to why there are variations among regional organizations and the failure of these IR-theories offering explanation.

Truth be said, political integration is an important factor that entails the degree of consolidation and level of organization of states into a cohesive political community (Giorgi & Pohoryles, 2005). However, the question remains whether early as well as contemporary theories can offer a compelling argument for why the EU is considered to be a success story. As argued above establishing common regulations and commitments are significant as such activities can make decision-making and the cultivation of a collective identity possible. This is especially true for integrated communities as these indicators demonstrate successful integration (Spolaore, 2013). As an explanation such achievements of political integration require member states at some point to delegate certain number of political decisions to a collective entity. Ernest Haas as one of the major figures within the IR-realm wrote extensively on what he called functional integration (Haas, 1994). For Haas a functional integration requires states to commit and be loyal to political activities. For the EU-example such an enactment to delegate national jurisdiction to a regional central authority was not an easy task to comply with, but according to the functional school of thought this was deemed functionally necessary to create a new political community that could coexists with the given circumstances. Integration therefore in this respect is a cumulative leap of faith for sovereign units to learn to trust, and commit to a regional authority (Haas, 2008).

For Haas integration begins in specific sectors, particularly economics and technical cooperation, rather than politically sensitive areas. Initial cooperation in one sector is believed to create pressure for further cooperation in related areas, known as the spillover effect. Supranational institutions are emphasized as necessary to manage and oversee the integration process, transcending national interests and focusing on common functional goals. The role of technical experts and technocrats is highlighted, with the expectation that their focus on practical problem-solving will drive integration forward. Functional integration is proposed to contribute to peace and stability by fostering interdependence and cooperation in critical sectors. This theory was particularly influential in explaining early European integration efforts, such as the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community. Over time, functionalism evolved into neo-functionalism, which acknowledges the importance of political factors and the role of member states alongside supranational institutions. Neo-functionalism acknowledges that national sovereignty and political and cultural differences may hinder integration.

Neo-functionalism is a theory that focuses on the supranational nature (Jensen, 2013, p. 53) of the EU-model, while non-state actors such as NGO's, INGO's are perceived as equally important agents with civic responsibilities within the IR-realm. Therefore, states are not the sole actors in the international arena, but are merely one of many other actors. The diversity and *single-purpose nature* of non-state actors make it possible to go beyond basic cooperations and further focus on specific policy sectors that enables more coherent and complex integration. Such a process is also referred to as the spillover-effect (Jensen, 2013, p. 56). Because of the spilling over, new areas of cooperation open up resulting in deeper integration in other new areas. Neo-functionalism was able to highlight the importance of the participation of civic groups in the form of civil institutional actors, yet it was also criticized for the lack of attention to public opinion and democratic governance, which is why such interest groups could also be considered as the creation of new elite groups. Such elite groups would be more successful compared to ordinary individuals in getting governments to comply in their own agendas. While such interest groups would further aid the integration or regional institutions, they would ultimately create new elites, and push individual citizen influence to the back.

Neo-functionalism was criticized by what came to be known as intergovernmentalism (Verdun & Laursen, 2020) that focused on cooperation and competition among national governments to be the driving force behind integration. We can argue that intergovernmentalism has a more realist perception of how member states would be driven by their national interests, which is why states according to this theory would only cooperate in areas that would strengthen their national interests while avoiding policy areas that would weaken them. Intergovernmentalism argues that integration is a process that is determined by what states perceive to be high politics (Verdun & Laursen, 2020,

p. 5). State actors will therefore seem like delegating their sovereign powers, but in reality, they actually cooperate to retain their sovereignty and never transfer true power to the supranational level. Stanley Hoffmann supports the theory that national governments ultimately make the decisions that best fits in their national interests (Hoffmann, 1995, p. 45). However, intergovernmentalism became controversial as the EU moved into policy areas such the Monetary Union and the Common Foreign and Security areas. Andrew Moravcsik came up with the idea of liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1992), that focused on state interests by means of negotiations, wherein states behave rationally in relevant decision-making areas. States thus are rational actors that calculate the benefits and costs. According to Moravcsik national actors have specific state-oriented preferences that are part of interstate bargains that on their turn construct regional institutions. Therefore, these negotiations are critical in strengthening control over domestic affairs. Such a mechanism that strengthens the position of states cannot mean to lose one's sovereignty. Such rational negotiations take place within the context of voting systems, such as the qualified majority voting that does not let domestic control to be lost.

Multi-level governance (MLG) is another contemporary integrationist theory that has looked into the EU as a successful model (Papadopoulos, 2007, p. 18). MLG also does not perceive member states as losing power but rather puts emphasis on the multi-level structure, where decision-making takes place. MGL too focuses on a system of continuous negotiation on a complex multi-level construction, which implies a dispersal of authority by means of negotiations through decision-making. Such a decision-making is thus a complex mix of hierarchies and networks. MLG embraces participation of non-state actors in decision-making through complex overlapping layers that constantly requires coordination and structural innovations. From these early as well as contemporary regionalist theories an evolution of thoughts and ideas can be revealed. The early integrationist theories offer and advocate structural emphasis pointing to pragmatic arguments such as benefits of cooperation, influence of social interaction and cultural assimilation to build trust and create pluralistic security communities, or the effects of spillovers resulting in deeper political integration. However, with the contemporary theories one can observe the combined arguments and the emphasis on the rational decision-making competences of European states. The multi-level governance (MLG), demonstrates the perspective on rationality of negotiations on policy-making. With this, one may argue that the evolution of integration theories reflects a continuous refinement and expansion of rationality of ideas, addressing the ability to overcome complexities and challenges posed by integration processes.

For John McCormick on the other hand, there can be many reasons for why sovereign states would integrate. For some states, especially small states, security could be a compelling argument (*think of the NATO*), economic reasons to uplift one's nation from poverty or simply the existence of shared

norms and values could be among such reasons. It is beyond doubt that various motives for integration in the advent of the EU persisted, yet we also see that the emphasis on more political (democratic, human rights) values have become more prominent for the EU. As argued in the previous paragraph functionalism, also functional cooperation in international relations is closely linked to the idea of integration. The idea of integration in this regard is a functional one because it enables the construction of a *community* (Mitrany, 1948, p. 354). Such a community is a desired ideal, as this was articulated by David Mitrany to be a rational outcome of states that head out to integrate (Haas, 2008, p. 45). As debated fiercely in literature, the definition of integration is widely incohesive, as to what it should mean, a *process* or a *condition*. Whichever it may be in the end integration is about setting the boundaries as either norms or rules to enable free trade and consolidating harmony in terms of policies that make it possible to realize a healthy civil society that embrace diversity and change. There should be no resistance to such a description, yet such an ideal should be realized by people who will have an unparalleled work ethos, which is lacking so far in these theoretical frames.

Other scholars such as Karl Deutsch perceive integration as a *condition* of already “integrated” states that have somewhere in the past taken a stance against the use of violence. Such a stance is relevant considering the violent recent past of the Western European states that were in dire need for a sense of understanding and cooperation moving forward in a long process of community and identity building. Deutsch's integration is about integrated political communities characterized by a stable and lasting peace, known as security communities. In these communities, states are expected to resolve conflicts through peaceful means, having established mutual trust and a commitment to avoiding violence. A sense of community, built on shared values, norms, and identities, is deemed essential for sustaining cooperation and ensuring the resilience of integration. Frequent and intense communication and social transactions among states are highlighted as crucial for building trust and mutual understanding. The socialization of political elites through regular, meaningful interactions is also emphasized, as it fosters a shared perspective and commitment to peaceful cooperation. Deutsch's transactionalism (Spinelli et al., 2017) focuses on the social dimensions (Deutsch, 2015, p. 5) of integration and suggests that increased social interaction and cultural assimilation build trust and goodwill among people, making conflicts unthinkable. Transactionalism does not necessarily require specific legal or institutional frameworks and highlights the importance of creating pluralistic security communities through social integration.

The historical context, particularly the violent past of Western European states, is considered significant in this theory, as the aftermath of the World Wars created a dire need for a new approach to international relations focused on peace and cooperation. This context is seen as a driving force behind the push for integration in post-World War II Europe, exemplified by the creation of the

European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community. Deutsch's approach does not rhyme with Haas's functionalism due to its focus on holistic development of a sense of community and mutual trust, rather than practical cooperation in specific sectors.

Declining Regional Organizations

Regional organizations were brought to life in San Francisco 1945, to promote cooperation and coordination to address global and local challenges (Iriye, 2002). It is an uncontroversial observation that regionalization has aided global structures, by means of international treaties and agreements to tackle global humanitarian challenges such as climate change, global pandemics, and global financial crises (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2006). Regional organizations have been studied extensively during the last decades and there is a vast number of studies[†] that collect data on regional organizations on a wide array of indicators. Regional organizations by definition are organized legal personalities that are constituted by at least two contiguous states that act as members, and are cosignatories, either cooperate, integrate or in the least have the intention to coordinate regional efforts in multidimensional scope (Jetschke & Theiner, 2016). According to the phases of integration developed by Bela Balassa in 1962 (Andrei, 2012) there are five phases of integration, These phases are, phase 1: free trade, phase 2: customs union, phase 3: common market, phase 4: economic union and the last phase which is full economic integration (Balassa, 2013). In the initial phase of integration, countries strive to eliminate tariffs and quantitative restrictions on trade between the participating nations. This phase focuses on promoting economic integration by facilitating the free movement of goods across borders. In the second phase, efforts are made to not only eliminate discrimination in the movement of goods within the union but also to equalize tariffs for trade with countries outside the union. This aims to create a better level of playing field and ensure fairness in trade relations with non-member states.

Moving forward, a common market is established in the third phase, where control on trade and on free movement of labour and capital are abolished. This allows for greater liberalization of resources within an integrated region. In an economic union, which is the fourth phase, focus shifts towards elimination of restrictions on both movement of goods and services. There is also the objective to harmonize national economic policies among member states. This harmonization aims to align economic policies and promote a more cohesive economic framework. Lastly, full economic integration is about a unification of monetary, fiscal, and socio-cultural policies, which are

[†] See databases such as CROP (Comparative Regional Organizations Project), <https://comparativeregionalorganizations.org/about-crop-1>

coordinated under a centralized authority. This final phase represents the *highest level* of integration, where countries not only have common economic policies but also share a unified approach to monetary management, fiscal decisions, and social welfare measures. Table 1 demonstrates some of the most well-known regional organizations and the phase of integration these organisations find themselves in. To evaluate the *effectiveness* and work ethos, I have not settled for the annual gross domestic product of these organizations or other criteria, or whether these organizations have established complex institutions. To establish the success of their integration, it is of utmost importance whether these regional organizations have *internal work discipline*, functional institutions and whether these institutions provide distinct democratic negotiations (meetings) that occur in higher frequency.

According to literature on European Union, which is considered to be a regional organization, the EU has realized almost all phases except for the last phase, which is the full economic integration. The European Union was able to achieve customs union in 1968. In 1992 the single market phase was realized and in late nineties the economic and monetary union (EMU) was established with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. The economic emphasis laid by the phases of integration, forms a bridge to Weber's rational economic model as explained in detail in the paragraphs above. According to Jetschke and Theiner the central question in their studies was why the great number of regional organizations around the world have institutional similarities resembling the European Union structure (Jetschke & Theiner, 2016). There are three explanations that are provided, the functional, random co-evaluation and coercive external pressures. According to the functional explanation, similarities are due to functional necessities that are proven to be functional elsewhere increasing the probability that similar structures and institutions will deliver similar results even in different regions.

One of the biggest problems known are the lack of proper datasets on regional organizations (Jetschke et al., 2021). Anja Jetschke and her friends have collected and improved data on similarities of institutional structures but have remained to merely look into similarities of institutional structures and not to the effectiveness of these institutional models of regional organizations. Haftel and Thompson (Haftel & Thompson, 2006) studied 'independence' as a factor among regional organizations and Gray and Slapin (Gray & Slapin, 2013) have asked the question of effectiveness among regional economic organizations (REO) putting the emphasis on trade agreements rather than the overall effectiveness of the institutional structures. Nevertheless, Gray and Slapin do state that the effectiveness of REOs can be measured using a variety of dimensions, such as trade flows, institutionalization, and expert assessments. However, they argue that *expert assessments* are far better instruments that offer actual functioning of these organizations beyond technical indicators. Gray and Slapin do not provide an answer to the overall effectiveness and argue that even in terms of

economic dimension organizations can vary depending on their institutional design, the level of economic development of the member states, and specific goals and objectives of each organization. Additionally, measuring effectiveness can be complex and may involve multiple dimensions. Therefore, it is difficult to make a definitive statement about which REOs are the most effective without further context or analysis.

Regional Organization	Phases	Meeting Times	Common Currency
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	Primarily security	Once per Annum	No
ASEAN	Phase 2	Twice per annum	No
European Union (EU)	Phase 4	Once per month	Yes
MERCOSUR	Phase 2	Once per annum	No
NAFTA (UMSCA now)	Phase 1	-	No
African Union (AU)	Phase 1	Twice per annum	No

Table 1: Authors own compilation[‡]

It can be deduced from Table 1 that the EU-model is the only one that possesses most frequent number of meetings together with highly effective functioning institutions. This can be seen from the number of meetings but also the integration phases these organizations are categorized. The EU-model is the only regional organization in the world that was able to implement *single currency* throughout the union. There are numerous regional organizations that have similar objectives but lack certain qualities to realize such grand objectives as the creation of a single currency. While the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a *single-purpose organization* focused mainly on security, EU, ASEAN, MERCOSUR and AU have had economic integration as their main objectives. ASEAN's regionalism has already surpassed the goal of economic development and has shifted its focus to market

[‡] Data on for this table are drawn from official websites of the aforementioned regional organizations.

integration (phase 2) (Ishikawa, 2021, p. 33). According to literature MERCOSUR is considered to have completed the third phase, but has been struggling to further advance its efforts of common market which is why it is safer to categorize MERCOSUR in phase 2 (Erhan & Akdemir, 2019, p. 35). The NAFTA is known in the literature as a single-purpose organization, which classifies NAFTA (UMSCA now) as a phase 1 regional organization. However, the AU has multi-purpose objectives, but has been struggling with unstable economic member states and lack of institutional facilities.

The second explanation is a so-called random co-evolution, which argues that state preferences and characteristics together with their specific interests or ideas are determinant in the way regionalization takes shape. Both rationalist (Haftel, 2012) as well as constructivist schools of thought can be used to perceive how structural arguments as well as historical arguments could have influenced legal cultures (Acharya & Johnston, 2007). A third explanation argues that regional organizations are purposefully constructed by a much stronger and more powerful state, also called a hegemon to create satellite organizations to have these regional organizations serve for the interests of the hegemon (Krasner, 1976), which would be why a much more powerful state would be interested to extend its influence beyond national borders.

The Failure of Globalization and the Evolving Role of the United States

The role of the United States in the global economy has been a subject of intense academic debate in recent decades. Several studies present a complex picture characterized by both potential decline and a shifting international landscape (Taskinsoy, 2020). Literature demonstrates debates on the diminishing role of US dominance (Fry, 2007) in the globalization. Scholars like Earl Fry (2007) predict a decline in US superpower status by 2040, citing internal challenges such as the political instability within the US and the rise of strong Asian and European competitors. Joseph Nye (Nye Jr, 1990) emphasizes a relative decline from the US's preeminent power status in the mid-20th century, attributing this shift to the emergence of new global powers. Several factors are identified as contributing to this potential decline. The rise of China as a major economic force is frequently cited (Mendes, 2016). Taskinsoy (2020) highlights the destabilizing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy, further weakening the US position. Other studies point to the weakening influence of the US dollar (Kirshner, 2014) and internal political dysfunction (Keaney, 2013) as detrimental factors.

However, some scholars argue for a shift in the global power structure, with the US adapting to a multipolar world (Islam, n.d.). This perspective acknowledges the rise of new economic players but suggests a continued role for the US, albeit in a different configuration (Mendes, 2016). The debate surrounding the US's future influence extends beyond economic considerations. Studies explore the

decline of US military primacy (Brands et al., 2017) and its weakening resolve on the international stage. These factors undoubtedly contribute to the broader question of the US's global standing. Earlier studies, such as those by Dees (2009) and White (2005), may not fully capture the most recent economic and geopolitical developments.

One of the primary indicators of the failure of international regionalization is the persistence of economic disparities both between and within regions. Despite efforts to achieve economic convergence, significant inequalities remain. For instance, the European Union (EU) has struggled to bridge the economic divide between its Northern and Southern member states. Martin (2016) highlights that the economic divergence within the EU undermines the integration process, as the less economically developed states face continual disadvantages that prevent them from fully benefiting from regional cooperation.

Political instability and fragmentation further impedes regional integration. The rise of nationalism and protectionism across various regions has weakened political cohesion. The Brexit vote serves as a prominent example of how nationalist sentiments can disrupt regional unity. Hooghe and Marks discuss how the increasing influence of nationalist parties in Europe poses a significant threat to the EU's political stability and integration efforts (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). Political conflicts and a lack of consensus among member states exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult to implement cohesive regional policies. Institutional weaknesses are another critical factor contributing to the failure of international regionalization. Many regional organizations lack the enforcement mechanisms and institutional capacity to effectively manage and promote integration. The European Union's slow response to the Eurozone crisis, as analysed by Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier, demonstrates how institutional inefficiencies can hinder timely and effective crisis management, thereby weakening the overall integration process (Jones et al., 2016).

Deep-seated social and cultural differences also play a significant role in the failure of regionalization. These barriers hinder the development of a shared regional identity and solidarity among member states. Fligstein, Polyakova, and Sandholtz found that despite efforts to foster a European identity, national identities remain dominant, limiting the sense of belonging to a broader regional community (Fligstein et al., 2012). This lack of social cohesion undermines the foundation of regional unity. Regional conflicts and security issues further complicate integration efforts. The instability in the Middle East and North Africa, impacting the Mediterranean region, is a case in point. Fawcett argues that persistent regional conflicts and the lack of effective collective security mechanisms undermine the stability necessary for successful regional integration (Fawcett, 2019). Additionally, external geopolitical pressures often disrupt regional cooperation, as seen in various parts of the world.

Limited economic interdependence among member states is another indicator of the failure of regionalization. Effective regional integration requires high levels of trade, investment, and economic activities across borders. However, many regions have not achieved this level of interdependence. The African Continental Free Trade Area, for example, has struggled to significantly boost intra-African trade, illustrating the challenges of creating integrated markets (Signé & Madden, 2021). Global economic and political shifts have also impacted the success of regionalization. The global financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent Eurozone crisis highlighted the vulnerabilities and strains within regional economic systems. Krugman notes that global economic downturns can severely impact regional stability, revealing the fragility of regional integration efforts (Krugman, 2013). Furthermore, shifts in global power dynamics, with the rise of new economic powers like China, have altered the global landscape, challenging the traditional dominance of established regional blocs.

In the Central Asian region, the most significant change is China's increasingly active involvement in the economic activities of all Central Asian countries (Melnikovová, 2020). While Russia combines political and economic means to exert its influence, China primarily focuses on economic projects. Both China and Russia actively seek to limit US presence in Central Asia (Mankoff, 2013). Meanwhile, the US is losing interest in the region despite the ongoing threats of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, which remain significant security concerns both regionally and globally (Park JeongWon et al., 2021). These security threats in Central Asia should be viewed as global issues, especially considering the fragile contexts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which border Afghanistan, and the potential of Central Asian territories as transit zones. Additionally, regions within Russia, such as the North Caucasus, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan, as well as areas in China with Uighur and Dungan populations, are also focal points for Islamist activities. Experts question the ability of Russia and China to effectively counter these threats. Afghanistan, over the past two centuries, has been a continuous conflict zone without clear victories for any side.

Central Asia acts as a buffer zone for Russia, China, and the West. From Russia's perspective, Central Asia consists of former Soviet republics and the southern edges of its borders. China views the region as a crucial transit corridor to Europe and Russia, and more broadly, as a bridge between the East and the West (Krapohl & Vasileva-Dienes, 2020). The West has traditionally regarded Central Asia as a strategic outpost for accessing the Middle East. Some experts consider the US withdrawal from the political scene in the region a significant setback. In the past, the US managed to balance the ambitions of local authorities and counter hegemonic powers in the region effectively.

Regarding Latin American governments solutions through international law and regional cooperation were not viable as they could not rely on existing international norms to protect their sovereignty,

they had to develop their own frameworks. Simón Bolívar's 1826 Panama Congress aimed to coordinate defence and legitimize independence but had limited success, with only Gran Colombia ratifying the treaty and minimal participation from other states (Seckinger, 1976). Despite this, the congress set a precedent for regional cooperation. Subsequent efforts in regionalism often failed to produce lasting agreements but continued to focus on enhancing state legitimacy and capacity. Regional cooperation, such as trade and infrastructure projects, aimed to stabilize the region and consolidate state authority. However, Latin American states frequently faced challenges from European interventions and internal instability (Rosser, 1995).

By the late 19th century, regional initiatives, including the Montevideo Congress of 1888, symbolized efforts to address geopolitical and governance issues but often lacked significant impact due to limited participation and the persistence of national interests. In the 1880s, the U.S. launched Pan-Americanism, a hemispheric cooperation project that eventually dominated an already complex landscape of regionalisms. This shift was partly due to U.S. hegemony and Latin American governments' desire to engage with Washington while managing its influence. Pan-Americanism allowed Latin American governments to continue regional cooperation efforts and address social issues within their states. Initially, Pan-Americanism focused on a customs union and arbitration, but Latin American nations were wary of these goals due to their impact on trade and recognition of U.S. hegemonic intentions. Despite limited immediate outcomes from the early conferences, the framework established opportunities for further regional cooperation. The movement gained traction in the early 20th century, with the Pan-American Union (PAU) strengthening its role, though it often remained symbolic and faced scepticism from Latin American governments.

Conclusion

This paper observes that established theoretical frames such as functionalism, neo-functionalism, or intergovernmentalism are inadequate to elaborate on the fragmentation of regionalization in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is compelling to observe the geographical variation among regional organizations around the world as such theories argue for the emergence of a rational, systematic, and specialized model of Western regionalization and dominance. This paper can be set to work to understand regional differences and their impact on international relations where regional organizations, originally established to promote cooperation and coordination in addressing global and local challenges, have played a pivotal role in shaping global structures through international treaties and agreements.

The phases of integration, as conceptualized by Bela Balassa, illustrate a progressive model for economic collaboration, culminating in full economic integration as progressed in the Western world. The European Union, while achieving notable progress in integration phases, remains an exception rather than the norm. The effectiveness of regional organizations is frequently hampered by internal and external factors. Persistent economic disparities, political instability, and institutional weaknesses undermine efforts at regional cooperation. National identities often overshadow regional solidarity, further complicating integration efforts. Literature indicates that while regional organizations like the EU have made strides, others struggle with achieving similar levels of integration due to varying institutional designs, economic development levels, and specific organizational goals.

The failure of globalization and the evolving role of the United States in the global economy highlight the shifting dynamics of international relations. The rise of new economic powers, geopolitical tensions, and internal challenges within dominant states like the US and EU contribute to the complexities faced by regional organizations. This evolving landscape necessitates a re-evaluation of the strategies employed by regional organizations to achieve their intended goals. Overall, while regional organizations have made significant contributions to international cooperation, their success is contingent upon overcoming multifaceted challenges. Future efforts must focus on enhancing institutional effectiveness, fostering political cohesion, and addressing economic disparities to realize the full potential of regional integration.

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