

WORKINGPAPER

No. 01, 2025

Comparative Regionalism in an Age of Conflict

Edward Best



Authors

Edward Best is an Associate Research Fellow at UNU-CRIS. From 2003 to 2023, while at the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), Maastricht, he led successive multiannual contracts on governance issues with the institutions and agencies of the EU. He was also work package leader in EU-funded research networks led by the University of Cologne, as well as Senior Fellow of Maastricht University. He has served as consultant for the European Commission, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

He thanks Philippe De Lombaerde and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments and suggestions regarding the present Working Paper.

About UNU-CRIS

The United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) is a research and training institute of the United Nations University, a global network engaged in research and capacity development to support the universal goals of the United Nations and generate new knowledge and ideas. Based in Bruges, UNU-CRIS focuses on the provision of global and regional public goods, and on processes and consequences of intra- and inter-regional integration. The Institute aims to generate policy-relevant knowledge about new patterns of governance and cooperation and build capacity on a global and regional level. UNU-CRIS acts as a resource for the United Nations system, with strong links to other United Nations bodies dealing with the provision and management of international and regional public goods.

The mission of UNU-CRIS is to contribute to generate policy-relevant knowledge about new forms of governance and cooperation on the regional and global level, about patterns of collective action and decision-making.

UNU-CRIS focuses on issues of imminent concern to the United Nations, such as the 2030 Development Agenda and the challenges arising from new and evolving peace, security, economic and environmental developments regionally and globally. On these issues, the Institute will develop solutions based on research on new patterns of collective action and regional and global governance. The Institute endeavours to pair academic excellence with policy-relevant research in these domains.

For more information, please visit www.cris.unu.edu

in alliance with



Abstract

In a world that is increasingly multipolar, multifocal and shaped by geopolitical rivalries, the different parts, more or less clearly organized as 'regions', obviously need to do what they can to understand each other. There is also considerable room for improvement in how regional arrangements are managed, and comparison is a customary way of trying to do better. Yet what can regions really learn from each other?

Regionalism has become coloured by civilizationism and approaches that reject universal values, as well as being more and more shaped by security concerns and direct material interests of the great and middle powers. In this context, comparison between regional arrangements as wholes is even more problematic than before.

Cross-regional exercises may be more fruitful if conducted in a multilateral perspective – for example, by looking at the results produced by different regional bodies in achieving common global goals - as well as by focusing on sectoral and project-based frameworks for mutual learning.

Keywords

Comparative regionalism, regional governance, civilizationism, mutual learning.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Lesson-Drawing Across Regions	5
2.1 The State of Play in the Literature	5
2.2 Present Challenges	7
3. Civilizationism and Regionalism	8
3.1 China	9
3.2 Russia	11
3.3 India	13
3.4 Risks of Regionalism in an Age of Conflict	14
3.5 Managing Civilizationism	15
4. Perspectives for Comparative Regionalism	16
4.1 Global Values and Regional Instruments	16
4.2 The Indispensable Multilateral Framework for Rationalization	17
4.3 Practice-Based Approaches	18
5. Conclusion	19
References	20

Introduction

Reflection on the challenges of comparison between regions has been taking place for some time (e.g. De Lombaerde et al., 2010). The days of simply benchmarking other regions' formal institutional structures against the European model are largely over. We have gone through different stages of redefining how we understand regionalism, and of opening up and globalizing our thinking about international relations (Acharya, 2014; Futák-Campbell, 2021). Obviously the European Union (EU) cannot be replicated and should not be simply emulated elsewhere. And all regional experiences are, by definition, unique. So where do we go from here? As Söderbaum has pointed out: 'a more advanced debate about comparative regionalism will not be reached simply by celebrating differences between European integration and regionalism in the rest of the world, or by painting all regions as unique'. As we look at this wide variety of 'regional spaces' in a multipolar world, is there still room for a 'problem-solving' and 'rationalist' approach to help build capacities for the management of regional arrangements? (Söderbaum, 2019)

This paper argues that it is still valid to pursue an analytical approach informed by theory and based on comparison that may offer guiding principles and inspiring examples regarding the match between regionalist objectives and governance capacities. However, this requires some adaptation of parameters and assumptions in light of current challenges.

The paper begins by briefly considering the state of play in the literature with regard to 'lesson drawing' as one mechanism of 'diffusion' across regions. Very few accounts are, in fact, to be found of such rationalist-functional institutional designs or adaptations or of the analytical frameworks that should be expected to accompany such exercises. There is also widespread recognition of the need to take into account the present rejection of what are often seen to be only Western values.

The main challenges for comparison are then summarized. On the one hand, there are few cases in which one can, in practice, apply functionalist criteria to one regional arrangement in isolation, and virtually none starting from nothing. The reality is often one of overlapping organizations and multiple interests (or lack of interest). On the other hand, one must be cautious about the parameters for assessment. The evidence suggests that there may be universal principles of regional integration with regard to functional requirements (that is, how to maintain the stability and outputs of regionalist arrangements) that do not necessarily include all the criteria of good governance that are identified with the values of liberal democracy as propounded by 'The West'.

The following section therefore addresses 'civilizationism', particularly as propounded by China, Russia and India; assesses the implications of these approaches for these powers' positions regarding regionalism; and outlines some risks for regionalism as well as current approaches to managing civilizationism.

The final part considers the perspectives for comparative regionalism in this context.

2. Lesson-Drawing Across Regions

2.1 The State of Play in the Literature

Various mechanisms have been identified in the literature on diffusion to describe how practices in one region may affect choices made in another, whether in terms of the idea of regionalism itself, institutional designs, or individual policies. Börzel and Risse usefully present these various diffusion mechanisms against the two parameters of a Logic of Consequence or a Logic of Appropriateness on the one hand and Direct Influence or Indirect Diffusion-Emulation on the other (Risse, 2016).

For the purposes of the present discussion, the mechanism of greatest relevance is 'lesson-drawing' (in their classification, an indirect mechanism following the logic of consequences). As opposed to simple 'emulation' of another region's formal goals and structures, actors may, in this case, 'seek to draw lessons from different institutional arrangements in order to learn about underlying cause-effect relationships in view of their own specific conditions'. These are rationalist attempts to find 'functional equivalents' to concrete problems (Lenz, 2012): a 'search process for the best available institutional or policy solution' (Risse, 2016). 'In the case of learning, the decisions made by other [*Regional Organizations*] ROs impart useful information about the solutions to specific co-operation problems. Diffusion dynamics in this process emanate from measurable performance differences between organizations that suggest 'superior' institutional solutions.' (Jetschke and Lenz, 2013, 629; Lenz, 2021)

There are many references in the literature to examples of cross-regional emulation concerning the model of the EU. Classic cases of whole-scale importation of European templates into contexts in which they did not really fit (the mechanism referred to as ‘mimicry’) include the Andean Community (Haubrich Seco, 2011), although it would be wrong to dismiss the agency of Andean actors, especially in the process of adaptation.

Lenz has also discussed the creation of Mercosur (Common Market of the South) and the structures of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), suggesting that these are examples of ‘spurred emulation’ of the EU. With regard to the original design of Mercosur in the 1991 Treaty of Asunción, he notes that there was constant reference to the EU and a general ambition to replicate Europe’s successful economic integration process. However, negotiations over the project were characterized more by ‘political enthusiasm’ than by thorough calculation of costs and benefits, or detailed analysis of the requirements and different options that could be explored to meet them. The Asunción Treaty’s ambition to complete the common market within four years ‘attests to a clear lack of serious assessment of what such a process entails’ (Lenz, 2012). EU technical support, when such comparative analytical frameworks were indeed used in EU-Latin American capacity-building initiatives related to implementation (for example, in the EU-Rio Group interregional training programme on regional integration - CEFIR), mainly came afterwards. Moreover, while there was enthusiasm to build a Mercosur community loosely inspired by Europe, there had also been a clear political choice not to adopt an institutional system with supranational powers.

The process by which the Mercosur Permanent Review Tribunal was created in 2004 likewise shows considerable ‘passive influence’ of the EU regarding the negotiating positions of the countries (Lenz 2021). However, this does not constitute an example of lesson-drawing either, to the extent that it ‘was not undertaken in response to functional needs but rather because of the pressure of epistemic communities and transnational networks’ (Malamud, 2018).

Another academic account has concerned exchanges between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the EU in the latter 2000s after the 2007 ASEAN Charter established a Committee of Permanent Representatives that ‘resonated’ with the EU Council’s COREPER (Murray and Moxon-Browne, 2013; Jetschke and Murray, 2012). The new structure was held by some to be inspired by the EU example. However, in all events, ASEAN ‘made sure that this did not lead to a pooling of decision-making power, which would have violated the sovereignty principle’ (Börzel and Risse, 2016). In other words, the formal replication (emulation or otherwise) of this ‘organizational’ element, while presumably helping to improve coordination, did not bring with it any change in the broader ‘institutional’ arrangements of ASEAN – that is, the rules and norms by which business is done. One might add that similar-sounding bodies had already been introduced in other contexts and through different processes. A Commission of Permanent Representatives of Mercosur was introduced in 2003. A Permanent Representatives Committee was incorporated into the structure of the new African Union (AU) created in 2000, which was, quite explicitly, modelled loosely on the EU (Babarinde, 2007). However, a Council of Permanent Representatives was also introduced in 1996 into the structure of the Teheran-based Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which was not.¹

There are even fewer accounts in the academic literature of how actors involved in one regional setting may actually have engaged in explicit cross-regional lesson-drawing at specific moments of institutional (re)design, in part because these are infrequent occurrences. Lenz and Reiss (2024) provide a valuable analysis of the institutional-design process of the East African Community (EAC), which was re-established in the 1990s. They identify the impact of the first EAC and the Common Market of Southern and Eastern Africa (COMESA) as well as the EU as an example of ‘global diffusion’. They demonstrate the existence of multiple sources of inspiration, as well as ‘the significantly more important role of local actors in transnational diffusion processes than much of the literature acknowledges’ and their capacity for institutional innovation. They do not report or assess whether the resulting arrangements are considered more or less appropriate and effective.

Equally, there are few, if any, published examples of comparative frameworks that may have been used in cases of thinking about desirable features of regional arrangements as a whole. There have been cases of structured analytical frameworks being developed to shape discussion of institutional needs and capacities in particular regional cases where reform is pursued (one of these being the BID-CEPAL Programme of rationalization of the institutional arrangements of the Central American Integration System (SICA) in the mid-1990s²). More broadly, there have been various efforts to establish globally relevant

¹ For that matter, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) also have structures with ‘Permanent Representatives’.

² <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/900dd0f4-58d3-4a29-a6ff-24c7e4788cd8/content>.

criteria for assessing the functional requirements and governance quality of regional arrangements in ways that accommodate cultural differences by looking to underlying goals, values and principles of ‘good governance’ (Best 2006). In other words, a comparative framework should not address only the formal level of whether or not regional texts and structures resemble each other. It should look at the extent to which, in the corresponding cultural and historical contexts, they satisfy a) basic functional requirements of the regional project (for example, reasonable levels of implementation of decisions, dispute settlement, respect for common positions, adaptation capacity) and b) basic governance criteria of transparency, accountability and participation. Rule of law, for example, can be seen as both a functional requirement for the stability of a regional arrangement (traders and investors want legal certainty, and member governments need to be seen to be treated equally) and a normative expectation in democratic governance.

One of the key points in such an approach is to encourage a governance capacity - formalized commitments, organizations, resources and policy instruments - that matches the specific needs and challenges that can be foreseen in a particular context.

2.2 Present Challenges

Such perspectives need to take into account three factors in the current context that significantly complicate rationalizing, problem-solving approaches.

Design amid confusion

First, there are virtually no cases these days of starting from nothing in negotiating a new regional governance system (‘regional integration’ in the classic use), as compared to agreements for the management of new transnational/transregional projects (‘regional integration’ in the more common contemporary sense of building connections and providing regional public goods through functional cooperation). These latter do require some degree of common action in harmonizing specific norms and practices but usually are not expected to spill over into broader national governance systems.

One of the main challenges is to address the many cases of overlap, or competition, between different regional arrangements and transregional projects. The traditional formulation of the challenge is that of dealing with the spaghetti (or noodle) bowls of overlapping regional arrangements. There are different schools of thought about how far overlap in the membership and scope of regional organizations may be problematic (Nolte, 2018). There may be a logic to joining multiple regional bodies to serve transboundary issues. ‘Some regional bodies are more specialised than others, while each offers a different set of members and partners with whom to engage. The borders of the regions are as arbitrary as those of their member states – the periphery of a large country like Niger is economically integrated with neighbours in North and Central Africa, and not just ECOWAS, thus arguably justifying membership of multiple regional organisations.’ (Biyers and Dieye, 2022) Yet there are also obviously clear risks of organizational inefficiencies and duplication, costs for member countries in resource allocation, inconsistencies that undermine possible benefits from harmonization and so on.

If one limits the scope to only the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa, out of the 55 members of the African Union (AU), 13 are in three RECs, 29 in two, and only 13 in just one. Opening up the picture to cover all bodies, Söderbaum and Stapel list 156 regional organizations (ROs) in Africa in 2020 – triple the number in the 1970s. In a few policy fields, there is no overlap. In some, there are ‘harmonious overlaps’ when ROs address different challenges within a given policy field or work in largely different geographic contexts. However, there are many more cases of ‘competitive overlap’ which are problematic.’ (Söderbaum and Stapel, 2022)

The multiplicity and competition among regional arrangements has taken on new forms that are much more troubling for global governance in Europe and Eurasia, where regionalism has become even more associated with spheres of influence, security interests and disputes over global values.

The questioning of global values

Second, it is not just a ‘multipolar’ world that is being promoted but more and more also a ‘multifocal’ world, in which the existence of different sets of values is explicitly asserted. This has increasingly taken a ‘civilizational turn’, as China, Russia,

India, and, to a lesser extent, Türkiye have affirmed their special status and distinctive contribution to the world. Even if major ‘non-Western’ powers recognise the utility of multilateralism and global organizations, they have increasingly come to challenge the existence of universal values based on ‘Western’ principles, and insist on the need for a new global order based instead on equality, dialogue and respect among civilizations.

One, therefore, needs to deal all the more carefully with the idea of common global parameters by which to compare and assess particular regional arrangements. There is much support for the idea that one must accept ‘the non-universal applicability and validity of traditional Western theories based on market-driven and liberal democratic approaches to regionalism. Perhaps, instead of stressing the theme of global convergence, a new, necessary theoretical approach to regionalism should be that of recognising the existence of multiple localised regionalisms and regional organisations, each with its own specificities. One focal point for the new approach in the study of this qualitatively new regionalism should be that of setting aside many of the concerns about (typically Western) norms diffusion and convergence of models, instead attaching more value to the specific conditions leading to the emergence of regionalism and to the creation of regional institutions.’ (Barbieri, 2019)

The primacy of security

Third, those conditions shaping regional arrangements are more and more being shaped by security considerations, rivalries and competing material interests. This is not limited to the biggest powers. We have also seen a rise in the assertiveness of regional, or ‘middle’, powers. Notable cases are India and Pakistan (although India is now becoming a global influence as well) and Türkiye. This sometimes takes on a civilizational dimension (e.g. Islamic Cooperation, the Turkic World). It also includes an increasing activism of Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in using their money to win friends and influence people, particularly in Africa. One of the main instruments in this process is the creation of corridors and connectivity.

This competition in providing what should ideally be seen as neutral (trans)regional public goods, coming on top of the frequent overlap of regional associations of different sorts, yet further complicates the objective of providing suggestions and support as to how regional arrangements may be best designed and implemented as means to serve welfare goals.

3. Civilizationism and Regionalism

Civilizationism may be summarized in basic terms as a vision that ‘ideologically articulates plural and distinct civilizational paths to modernity and regional orders, compared to a universal and convergent path toward one liberal modernity and global order’ (Bettiza et al, 2023, 11). In 2023, China, Russia and India took the ‘civilizational turn’ to a new level at more or less the same time in what is summed up by a sympathetic analyst as ‘a reaction to the self-proclaimed universality of the Western model and as an instrument of countering the hegemonist policies of the world minority. As such, the present paradigm largely insists on the plurality of civilisations and their equality.’ (Zemenek, 2024) The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) adopted in September 2024 thus emphatically rejects universalizing values. ‘The two sides are committed to preserving the diversity of world civilizations, champion equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness [...] The two sides firmly oppose the universalization of individual values and models, and stand firmly against ideological confrontation.’³ This section outlines the main features of these approaches, and tries to assess their apparent consequences for the concept and practice of regionalism.

³ https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202409/t20240905_11485719.html. A Conference on Dialogue between Chinese and African Civilizations has been held annually since 2022, following the inauguration in Beijing of the China-Africa Institute in Beijing in 2019. Such use of the term ‘African Civilization’ in a contemporary application (as opposed to the rich civilizations that have existed within Africa historically) appears to be quite new. The preamble to the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights invokes ‘the virtues of their historical tradition and the values of African civilization which should inspire and characterize their reflection on the concept of human and peoples’ rights’. However, the term does not appear in the constitutive act of the African Union, and an online search produces no examples of current use outside the China-Africa context.

3.1 China

China states that it is pursuing a multipolar world order based on sovereignty and equality in which China takes its rightful place. President Xi offers a 'Vision of Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind'. Like the Five Principles of Coexistence,⁴ this is said to be 'rooted in traditional Chinese values' such as 'Promote harmony among all nations' and to demonstrate China's 'benevolence.' It is an effort to 'contribute more to humanity'.⁵

This vision has been elaborated in three documents issued in recent years - the Global Development Initiative in September 2021, the Global Security Initiative in April 2022 and the Global Civilization Initiative in March 2023. These are explicitly presented, together with the major initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative as 'providing public goods to the world'. These three documents also support the Chinese response to Western discourse on human rights, as in the Chinese Proposal on the Reform and Development of Global Governance of September 2023.⁶ Human rights should be safeguarded through enhancing security; advanced through more inclusive, universally beneficial and sustainable development; and facilitated through cooperation on the basis of mutual respect.

There continues to be considerable suspicion in the West (and indeed across the South as well) about Chinese intentions, and scepticism about this discourse of Chinese altruism, given the well-known points of concern about human rights as well as territorial ambitions and global intentions.

The Chinese vision can be seen as 'authoritarian communitarianism' based on Confucian thought (Song and Ai, 2023). Western and Asian value systems are both complex, and cannot be reduced to a neat dichotomy between individualist liberalism and the more communitarian-based Confucianism. Yet there are a number of points of fundamental difference in understanding. These may seem to be more a matter of necessary coexistence or inevitable clash. 'In Confucianism, a community is understood quite specifically as a political entity with a vertical, rather than a horizontal, composition, as opposed to the traditional Western conception of a community based on social contracts and connection.' (Futák-Campbell and Wang, 2021) Alternatively: 'For Americans, democracy is the only just form of government: authorities derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. That is not the prevailing view in China, where it is common to believe that the government earns or loses political legitimacy based on its performance.' (Allison, 2017) For present purposes, the point is that there may be culturally based grounds on which regional arrangements are considered more or less appropriate in terms of governance quality, and which 'challenge the European regionalism as a model to be emulated' (Futák-Campbell and Wang, 2021).

How does this seem to be playing out in terms of Chinese policy regarding regional arrangements?

'There is some evidence of China deploying such concepts as foundational principles for the multilateral organizations it initiates.' 'However, China's attempts to "upload" its preferred normative vision to multilateral institutions, even its own, are not always successful.' And it is not at all clear whether all these initiatives, in reality, do add up to a coherent international order (Stephen, 2021).

China's programmes focus on what its companies can offer most efficiently, which is infrastructure. Its approach to international cooperation includes a certain pattern of semi-formalized hub-and-spoke exchanges based on Chinese leadership in developmental practice. This pattern intrudes little on internal affairs like policy design or macroeconomic management since China has consistently followed the rule of non-interference in internal affairs in its diplomacy (He, 2020; Calabrese and Tang, 2020).

China professes to see the United Nations as the key institution that can provide common goods to the world (Song and Ai, 2023) and strives to achieve positions of influence within the UN bodies – in other words, to shape the evolution of the existing

4 Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

5 Speech to the Conference marking 70th anniversary of Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, 28 June 2024. <https://english.news.cn/20240628/71733dd6f26441d4965dbb1a937e21ef/c.html>.

6 <https://english.news.cn/20230913/edf2514b79a34bf6812a1c372dcdcf1b/c.html>.

global arrangements ‘from within’. ‘China’s vision, unlike the Russian strategy towards changing the world order, is inspired by a long-range perspective aimed at progressively transforming the existing framework of institutions and policies rather than subverting it suddenly and with disruptive actions’ (Attinà and Feng, 2023).

It has also created a large number of multilateral bodies linking China and regional groupings. In 2000 a model of ‘triennial hub-and-spokes consultations’ (Stephen, 2021) began with the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, followed by: in 2004, the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum; in 2005, the China–Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum; in 2012, the forum on Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries; in 2015, the Forum of China and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States; and in March 2016, the Lancang–Mekong Cooperation Forum.

These are accompanied by a wide range of cooperation frameworks and consultative bodies. In the case of Latin America, for example, around 20 sectoral cooperation meetings are listed in the CELAC–China Action Plan for 2022–2024.⁷ Some of these emphasise China’s particular achievements, notably the Forums on Poverty Reduction and Development that exist between China and CELAC, South Asia and the SCO, linked to the International Poverty Reduction Center in China, and the Development Knowledge Networks with ASEAN, Central Asia and Africa, linked to the Center for International Development Knowledge in China. These are explicitly tied to the implementation of the UN SDGs as an example of Chinese leadership in global governance.

Many of the bodies that China has helped create are very loosely institutionalised. China is indeed ‘very comfortable with the idea of a rather feeble and ineffective institutional architecture’ in East Asia (Beeson, 2019) for geopolitical reasons. It is greatly preferable from the Chinese point of view to promote the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ of non-interference that characterizes the SCO, and for this to interact with the non-interventionism of ASEAN. Moreover, with its emphasis on non-interference, mutual respect and equality, as well as security, the SCO is now presented in Chinese media as ‘a model for regional cooperation’ in the circumstances following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁸

Even if many of the new regionalist forums promoted by China are not institutionalized, this does not mean they have no relevance. They have come to play an important role in agenda-setting and social networking within global governance (Stephen, 2021). The point is more that the Chinese do not seem to attribute importance to the nature or quality of regional arrangements, would tend to be suspicious about supranationalism, and argue that this is none of their business anyway. Regionalism is relevant in Chinese policy in terms of ‘its instrumental value, as a means of attaining great-power status rather than of instituting regional governance and organisation’ (He, 2020).

Above all, China’s relations with developing countries, despite the value for China of multilateral forums in boosting legitimacy and showcasing Beijing’s benevolence, are essentially bilateral in practice (Eisenman and Heginbotham, 2020). In the case of Africa, there may be convergence between China and the African regional integration in promoting structural transformation. ‘This convergence, however, does not translate into direct support from Beijing for the regional integration project, as its strategy remains essentially bilateral.’ (Colom-Jaén and Mateos, 2022, 62) this interaction may highlight a certain convergence between the African regional integration projects and China’s desire to promote structural transformation strategies, with investment in infrastructure being an example. However, the article concludes that rather than reinforcing African regional integration, this essentially bilateral and highly pragmatic Chinese strategy may have some indirect returns on regional integration but is actually showing some signs of decline.”,”container-title”:”Politics and Governance”,”DOI”:”10.17645/pag.v10i2.4945”,”ISSN”:”2183-2463”,”issue”:”2”,”journalAbbreviation”:”PaG”,”license”:”https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0”,”page”:”61-70”,”source”:”DOI.org (Crossref At the continental level, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation ‘operates as a multilateral framework but often involves bilateral negotiations. This reflects China’s preference for direct control and quick returns, and Africa’s desire for tailored terms and faster results. [...] African countries often enter negotiations alone, without a cohesive strategy.’ (Kluiver, 2024) At the regional level, some suggest that, despite its formal engagement with the RECs, there is, in fact,

7 These are the China-Latin America Superior Defense Forum; Legal Forum; Infrastructure Cooperation Forum; Business Summit; High Level China-Latin America Investment and Cooperation Forum; Forum of Ministers of Agriculture; Science, Technology and Innovation Forum; Digital Technology Anti-Epidemic Cooperation Forum; Space Cooperation Forum; Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative; Forum on Transport Cooperation; Forum on Traditional Medicine; Poverty Reduction and Development Forum; Martial Arts Exchange Forum; Think Tanks Forum; High-Level Academic Forum; Youth Development Forum; Forum for Cooperation among Local Governments of China and CELAC countries; People’s Friendship Forum. A Private Sector Cooperation Forum and Media Forum are being planned. https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/685494/CHINA_-_CELAC_JOINT_ACTION_PLAN_2022-2024.pdf.

8 Wang Yiwei, ‘Shanghai Spirit ushers in new chapter of shared future for humanity’ CGTN 2 July 2024.

a ‘tendency of China to ignore regional institutions in its bilateral engagement, for instance, with the EAC member states’ (Otele, 2020, 15). Similar views are heard about bilateral agreements with China as contributing to fragmentation in Latin America, as in the case of talks with Mercosur member Uruguay.

3.2 Russia

The Russian Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) of 2023 gives a new prominence to civilizational discourse. It refers to the ongoing ‘formation of a more equitable multipolar world order’ that takes due account of ‘Russia’s special position as a unique country-civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power that brings together the Russian people and other peoples belonging to the cultural and civilizational community of the Russian world’.

The implicit global relevance of Russia’s civilizational experience is of, at best, a general nature, a combination of moral messianism and romantic nationalism that seems to echo Dostoevsky’s ‘civilizing mission’ for Russia, shaped also by the official ideology of ‘Russian Conservatism’.⁹ The FPC urges the protection of ‘universal and traditional spiritual and moral values (including ethical norms common to all world religions)’ while countering ‘attempts to impose pseudo-humanistic or other neo-liberal ideological views, leading to the loss by the humankind of traditional spiritual and moral values and integrity’.¹⁰

More relevant to the present discussion is the implicit ‘civilizational multilateralism’ that has been taking form in Russian thinking since at least the mid-2000s. A Russian World Foundation was created in 2007. This had a significant impact on the balance between the more or less politicized visions of Eurasian regionalism within Russia, against the background of the emergence of a global alliance of non-Western powers from a meeting of Foreign Ministers of Brazil, Russia, India and China in late 2006 to the formation of the BRIC grouping in 2009.¹¹ This included the notion of a ‘concert of civilizations’ (deliberately echoing the 19th century Concert of Nations) and ‘a “polycentric, multicivilizational world order” that would secure “an alliance of civilizations” instead of a “clash of civilizations.”’¹²

Within Eurasia, indeed, there was an important evolution in Russian positions regarding regional integration arrangements that have a broader interest in the political economics of regionalism (as well as being relevant to the tragedy of Ukraine).

The first efforts, in the turbulent 1990s, were rather unsuccessful. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created at the end of 1991 as the Soviet Union disappeared. It still exists in 2024 with nine members, but has never been much more than a superficial image of post-imperial cooperation. Efforts in the mid-1990s to establish a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan (plus Kyrgyzstan in 1996 and Tajikistan in 1997) on the basis of weak institutional arrangements came to little.

In the early 2000s, the EU and NATO moved towards enlargement, with the accession of the three Baltic States to both organizations in 2004. Russia, for its part, initiated a new phase in promoting economic integration in the post-Soviet space with proposals in 2000 for a Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) among Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. These already foresaw a stronger institutional structure, with a permanent executive and a Court, although decisions at this stage were not to be binding. A Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was signed in 2002 among Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan.

Competition between the EU and Russia, including ‘normative rivalry’ in terms of governance and regional integration, now increased in the ‘shared neighbourhood’ - those six countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) that had been part of the Soviet Union and which were also included within the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy (2004) and then the Eastern Partnership established in 2009.

Following the 2005 ‘Orange Revolution’, Ukraine moved definitively towards deep integration with the EU. Negotiations began

⁹ This section owes much to the book by Aliaksei Kazharski on Eurasian regionalism as a Russian identity enterprise (Kazharski, 2019).

¹⁰ https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/.

¹¹ This was preceded in 1996 by the loose association of Russia, India and China as RIC, and then joined in 2010 by South Africa to make BRICS.

¹² See the sources in Kazharski, 2019, 121.

in March 2007 for an Association Agreement (AA) to replace the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. A political agreement was reached in December 2011 and the AA was initialed in March 2012. (Van der Loo et al, 2014) Moreover, in the context of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, future membership of NATO was recognized in principle for both Georgia and Ukraine.

Against this background, Russia began to promote deeper regional integration arrangements with its neighbours that entailed meaningful forms of delegation of powers and pooling of sovereignty (Gast, 2017; Golovnin and Ushkalova, 2021; Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012). The Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) was created in 2006, and in October 2007 Russia signed a new Treaty for a Eurasian Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan. This would have stronger institutional arrangements, with a Eurasian Economic Commission and Court having binding powers of decision, and would lead not only to a united customs territory but also a Single Economic Space. These became effective in 2012. Ukraine was invited to join and did participate in negotiations for the new Treaty creating a Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The EAEU introduced further concessions from Russia, including an important, if perhaps symbolic, change in decision-making principles. Russia would no longer have a built-in majority of 57% in the system of weighted votes, with Belarus and Kazakhstan each having 21.5%. The new Eurasian Economic Commission and the Collegium would operate on the basis of one vote per member with possible voting by a two-thirds qualified majority.

The idea of Eurasian integration, as indicated above, was acquiring an ever greater identity importance for Russia. Moreover, it was clearly a matter of political and symbolic importance for Russia to be recognized - especially by the EU - as having helped bring about a supranational body of equal standing. Putin's Russia was both following a 'neorevisionist' policy in the neighborhood, and pursuing cooperation with the West, including the EU, since the West constitutes a 'significant other' for Russia: cooperation was, in this respect, a means to affirm Russia's role as a global power (Krasnodębska, 2021).

The incompatibility between association with the EU and membership of the EAEU was quite evident well in advance but neither side was willing or perhaps able to explore any kind of exceptional arrangements. 'A potentially peaceful positive-sum game competition of regional models of integration in Eurasia was transformed into a geopolitical rivalry, and both sides deny their responsibility for this transformation.' (Nikitina, 2021; Casier, 2022)

The 2016 Russian FPC still affirmed that 'The EAEU is based on universal principles of integration, and is designed to play an important role in harmonizing integration processes in Europe and Eurasia.[...] Russia's strategic priority in its relations with the EU is to establish a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific by harmonizing and aligning interests of European and Eurasian integration processes, which is expected to prevent the emergence of dividing lines on the European continent.'¹³

Yet Russia's position was understood to be quite the opposite on the other side '[B]y making Eurasian and European integration projects mutually exclusive, ruling [*Russian*] elites can prevent those states from concluding agreements with external actors, such as the EU. Regional organizations in that regard serve as tools to re-unite the former Soviet republics under a common institutional architecture, protect them from external influence, create new vertical dependencies, and promote a Russian regional blueprint based on the understanding of a natural Russian sphere of interests.' (Gast, 2017, 27)

There was also little doubt as to the larger importance of this rivalry between Russia and the EU. 'The negotiation of an EU-Ukraine Association Agreement has not only opened a new chapter in Ukraine's trade relations with the Union but, also, announced the start of a new geo-economic and geo-political power game in the region.' (Van Der Loo and Van Elsuwege, 2012). 'Even as they blocked immediate NATO membership, few Europeans stopped to consider the geopolitical implications of their own EU policies. Unwittingly, the EU was thus sucked into a geopolitical zero-sum game for the total allegiance of Ukraine.' (Biscop, 2024, 24)

Since 2014, Russia has continued to develop the EAEU, with its partly supranational approach, as well as to promote the SCO, with its very intergovernmental structure, as well as other regional arrangements in its neighborhood.

There is no obvious evidence of any particular Russian interest as to how regions beyond Eurasia may organize their institutional

¹³ https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/

arrangements. These relations are mainly of diplomatic importance. For example, Russia has also been actively promoting its role vis-à-vis Africa as an example of mutually respectful cooperation in the world. The 2023 FPC states that ‘Russia stands in solidarity with the African states in their desire for a more equitable polycentric world and elimination of social and economic inequality, which is growing due to the sophisticated neo-colonial policies of some developed states towards Africa.’ The first Russia-Africa Summit took place in 2019, and a second Summit in 2023. The Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan 2023–2026 covers most imaginable sectors of cooperation (with perhaps a special weight on countering terrorism) and reiterates the intention to expand the legal framework for cooperation with the AU and the RECs at the levels of both Russia and the EAEU, as well as interparliamentary cooperation.¹⁴

3.3 India

India also views itself as ‘a civilizational state’, with a sense of greatness (and of being the natural hegemon in South Asia), as well as priding itself on being a moral power.¹⁵ Its worldview is partly an idealized projection of India’s own experience onto the world order: ‘As the world’s biggest democratic industrializing country and given its internal diversity India is seen as a symbol for peaceful co-existence and has multiple interests and identities enabling India to assume the role of a global leading power and to bridge the differences in the world.’ (Wojczewski, 2017) This is now expressed in the civilisational ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) that shaped the motto of ‘One Earth, One Family, One Future’ for India’s 2023 Presidency of the G20. The more active projection reflects the fact, as Foreign Minister Jaishankar told the UN General Assembly: ‘From the era of non-alignment, we have now evolved to that of *Vishwa Mitra* - a friend to the world’.¹⁶

Narendra Modi, a leading figure in the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister since 2014, has increasingly promoted the idea that ‘Spreading the benefits of India’s civilizational legacies’ is ‘a global good’.¹⁷ India is cast as a ‘guru to the world’, in the spirit of figures such as Swami Vivekananda with his message of tolerance and universal acceptance, and the ‘integral humanism’ of Deendayal Upadhyaya (Hall, 2019). At the same time this civilizational approach has become more and more associated with Hindu nationalism: *Hindutva*.

India’s position is cast as ‘non-Western’ rather than ‘anti-Western’, as is considered often to be the case with other BRICS members. India is indeed highly pragmatic in its relationships, and skilled in contingent balancing. It is thus a member of the Quad (ilateral) Security Dialogue with the US, Australia and Japan, but also of the BRICS and the SCO together with China and Russia. It participates in and has helped create a complicated web of regional bodies in and around South Asia, influenced largely by considerations of the roles and interests of rival powers Pakistan and China.¹⁸

Discourse about the nature of India’s role in South Asia has evolved. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985, has had limited results due to tensions between India and Pakistan (as well as issues in Indian relations with other member countries over the years), limiting India’s region-building ability. In the 1990s, India adopted a ‘Look East’ policy in 1992, focusing on relations with ASEAN (renamed ‘Act East’ by Modi in 2014), as well as giving increased importance to developing subregional arrangements in which India would play a leading role.

This was notably expressed in the 1996 ‘Gujral doctrine’ set out by the Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral. Its five principles reflected the belief that India’s stature cannot be divorced from the quality of its relations with its immediate and smaller neighbours, and include that of non-reciprocity (Murthy, 1999). It ‘recognised that India’s relationships with its immediate neighbours had deteriorated as a consequence of thirty or so years of heavy-handed behaviour. It disavowed

¹⁴ <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5971>

¹⁵ Happymon Jacob, *A New Delhi View on the World Order* <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/new-delhi-view-world-order>

¹⁶ https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37148/National_Statement_by_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_General_Debate_of_the_78th_UNGA#:~:text=From%20the%20era%20of%20non,%2C%20where%20necessary%2C%20harmonize%20interests

¹⁷ https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/27948/Inaugural_Address_by_Prime_Minister_at_Second_Raisina_Dialogue_New_Delhi_January_17_2017

¹⁸ ‘India’s regional policy has been driven by the conviction that India is the natural hegemon in South Asia and that its small neighbours must respect India’s national interests and security concerns. This includes in particular not to allow an external power such as China to establish a presence or influence in South Asia.’ (Wojczewski 2017)

the tacit assertion, made most obviously by Indira Gandhi, that South Asia was India's sphere of influence and the implicit right to interfere in its neighbours' affairs.' (Hall, 2019) This was followed by the 'Singh doctrine'.¹⁹ This emphasized that deeper economic integration was needed in South Asia and that India should take the lead in bringing it about. It also suggested that lessons learned from India's democratic and development experience should be passed on to others (Hall 2019). Under the 'Neighbourhood First' policy, Modi in 2014 promised to focus attention on India's immediate neighbourhood: on improving bilateral ties with each South Asian state, on upgrading connectivity between them, and on mutual economic benefit.

This process has seen the emergence of new programme-based regional arrangements supported by the UN and/or the Asian Development Bank, as well as subregional initiatives that do not entail the participation of Pakistan. Notably, when a proposed new Motor Vehicle Agreement could not be agreed at the level of SAARC in 2014, Modi quickly moved to pursue the same objectives on a subregional level under the 2015 BBIN initiative, building on the dormant South Asian Growth Quadrangle among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. India has also pursued functional cooperation through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). India has not signed up to China's Belt and Road Initiative. It objects to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor under development since 2015 due to concerns about territorial sovereignty. A Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor began to be discussed in 2013, with a series of broader BCIM Forums for Regional Cooperation taking place in the following years. This was withdrawn from the BRI as Sino-Indian relations suffered, particularly with the 2020 border crisis. Instead, India has pursued a Trilateral Highway project linking India with Myanmar and Thailand in the framework of BIMSTEC. India's policy thus seems to exemplify the point that: 'The countries and governments engaged in multiple organizations generally do not focus on the problems that the overlapping of regional organizations might create, but are instead more concerned with the strategic options that the plurality of regional organizations might offer.' (Nolte, 2018)

There seems to be little evidence that India has a particular interest in deepening regional governance arrangements. In practice, India has tended to deal with each neighbour mainly bilaterally (Roy 2015). Moreover, India's efforts in practice do not seem to be shaped by an aim to transform the South Asian region (presumably excluding Pakistan) into a domain of integrated Indian-led civilization. 'For a state like India, which draws its international identity and appeal from being a rule-abiding and lawful country, the identity of an aggressive civilization does not fit well. In projecting *Hindutva* onto the international stage, the government has stressed more its spiritual and cultural elements rather than hard calculations of territoriality. To date, there is no evidence of official corroboration of any expansionist agenda in South Asia. [...] despite its rise within South Asia, India does not advance a strong civilizational argument. It has been circumspect and diffident in articulating its ties with South Asian states in civilizational terms. Therefore, civilizational claims are not realist calculations but cultural and historical products.' (Chatterjee and Das, 2023)

3.4 Risks of Regionalism in an Age of Conflict

In addition to civilizationism, the ways in which regional arrangements are being determined are increasingly a matter of security and geopolitics. This has brought about a new level of risk whether as a result of competitive success or of competitive disorder.

On the one hand, we have seen a tragic example not just of competitive but of conflicting regionalism in Europe. In the growing normative rivalry between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space, 'the most important battleground' – at that point still figuratively – was always going to be Ukraine (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012, 8). The fact that customs unions are, by definition, exclusive and mutually incompatible means that successful regional integration risks competition and even conflict according to geopolitical circumstances. Had some possibility of 'overlap' existed, allowing Ukraine to continue its difficult balancing act between the two sides, the rest might not have happened. Ukraine had to choose. If it had shifted in the other direction in 2013-2014, from the EU to the EAEU (as did Armenia at the same time), history might have been different. However, the all-or-nothing choice in economic commitments coincided with the even more sensitive security dimension, which likewise seemed to force a choice between opposing alliances rather than offering any meaningful overarching structure of cooperation. 'NATO expansion contradicted [*the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*] OSCE's doctrine of common security, or security with, rather than against, the adversary' (Acharya, 2018), while Russia was determined to have Ukraine as an exclusive sphere of its own influence. Looking to the future, one can only hope that there will still be an opportunity to explore new forms of regional organization and security cooperation that might do better.

On the other hand, we have an example of disorder resulting from the opposite starting point, namely the failure to coordinate

¹⁹ This doctrine concerns the thinking of Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister 2004-2014.

overlapping initiatives that could each be separately justified as offering a (trans)regional public good. The principal projects are those of the EU-sponsored programme for an International Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) starting in 1993; the multiple routes proposed under the 1998 Transit Transport Framework Agreement of the Economic Cooperation Organization; the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program established in 1997 by the Asian Development Bank with five other multilateral institutions; the six new land routes foreseen under the Agreement on Facilitation of International Road Transport of the SCO; the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) initiated by Russia, Iran and India in 2000 aiming to connect the Indian Ocean to Russia and Northern Europe; the New Eurasia Land Bridge (also known as the Second Eurasia Land Bridge as opposed to the Siberian Landbridge that is the Trans-Siberian railway – the ‘Northern Corridor’) and the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor developed under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI) in 2013; the ‘Middle Corridor’, also known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, promoted by in 2013, Türkiye in 2013; the ‘Eurasian Transport Network’ promoted by the Eurasian Development Bank and the Eurasian Economic Union; and the US-backed ‘India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor’ (IMEC) announced in 2023.

This competition among connectivities in Eurasia has, in fact, become widely known as the ‘Battle of the Corridors’. This is still figurative at the time of writing, but the danger of increased tensions and even conflict is also recognized. ‘The fact that rival geoeconomic connection projects are being put forward in the Persian Gulf and broader Middle East suggests that, instead of achieving their stated goal of promoting economic integration and cooperation, these projects may in fact exacerbate political antagonisms.’ (Hasan, 2024)

3.5 Managing Civilizationism

The UN has embraced the challenge posed by civilizationism in the form of the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC). Following a Spanish proposal made in September 2004 to the General Assembly in the wake of the bombings in Madrid earlier that year, this was established in 2005 as a UN initiative with co-sponsorship by Türkiye.²⁰ Despite its name, this body does not in fact use the term ‘civilizations’ in its presentation and its activities. The UNAOC motto is ‘Many Cultures, One Humanity’ and the discourse is, in fact, based in terms of ‘intercultural and interreligious dialogue, understanding and cooperation’. The Fez Declaration on the Ninth Global Forum of the UNAOC in November 2022 thus emphasizes the importance of ‘promoting the shared values and principles of multilateralism that are essential to counter the tendency to establish blocs or zones of influence’.²¹

In the same spirit, perceptions of an inevitable clash of civilizations will be reduced if one can counter the idea that there are distinct sets of ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ values which are mutually exclusive or necessarily incompatible. ‘When one hears civilization-based concepts such as *tianxia* with a nod toward global dominance from leaders in China; the exclusionary *hindutva* philosophy from Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party in India; or the historical achievements of Islam invoked in competition with the West from the leaders of Islamic countries such as Turkey, this should not obscure the fact that there are plenty of elements in Chinese, Indian, and Islamic civilizations that uphold what are often considered universal ethical principles of justice, benevolence, openness, humane governance, and representation of people’s voices. This is true in the reverse direction as well. A prime example is the Trump administration adopting policies on immigration, human rights, and equity (in health care, for example) that are a violation of the ethical principles that are viewed as foundations of Western European civilization.’ (Acharya, 2020, 150)

Efforts towards maintaining the idea of a common framework of values would be assisted not only if civilizational-state discourse were to be toned down, but also if major Western actors would desist from asserting the existence of universal values and then claiming them as their own.

This includes the EU. If it is hoped to promote a set of governance values as ‘universal’, then it does not help to define, or

²⁰ Other initiatives were pursued in parallel. ‘Spurred by the climate of mistrust which arose in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States and the subsequent divisive narrative of an intractable global “clash of civilisations,”’ the King of Saudi Arabia and Pope Benedict met in 2007 to discuss a new interfaith initiative. This led to the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), founded in 2012 by Saudi Arabia, Austria and Spain with the Holy See as Founding Observer, with a secretariat in Lisbon A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with UNAOC. <https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are>. In 2008 Azerbaijan initiated a ‘Baku Process’ consisting of a biennial World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue. The 2024 meeting is organized by the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), together with UNAOC and UNESCO.

²¹ <https://fezforum.unaoc.org/key-documents/>.

appropriate, these values as being ‘Western’ and certainly not as being ‘European’. For example, French President Macron in 2019 spoke of the need to build the EU ‘as a project of European civilization’ in the face of the prospect of world domination by the US and China.

Rosa Balfour has expressed well why such an approach may be seen as inappropriate, especially in former colonies and the Global South in general. ‘Branding Europe as a unique civilization undermines the EU’s attractiveness to the rest of the world. Europe is better served by reckoning with its colonial history and underlining the universality of human rights.’ ‘The historiography of European integration, by and large, ignores that it advanced together with the decolonization of European empires as if they were separate experiences.’ (Balfour, 2021) From the perspective of defending universal values about human rights and personal freedoms, it is, of course, hugely positive that the EU has constitutionalized them. Yet support for them elsewhere is undermined by the apparently irresistible temptation to claim them as European. For example, the European Commission presents the principles of the Global Gateway online as follows: ‘The European model of trusted connectivity in partner countries is long-term and in line with EU’s interests and values: rule of law, human rights and international norms and standards.’²² As a recent article puts it: ‘While the norms and standards promoted might hold universal value, coercion potentially features in the way they are promoted. [...] the Global Gateway documents outline a supply-based regionalism-diffusion project combined with a lack of reflection on compatibility.’ (Karjalainen, 2023, 310) It is particularly unfortunate that the UN Sustainable Development Goals - which could and should serve as a culturally neutral global framework for mutual learning - are promoted instead as a manifestation of European values and, indeed, interests: ‘As a major negotiating success of the EU globally, *the SDGs are a useful vehicle to project globally the EU’s values and objectives*, and provide a shared reference framework useful for international partnerships.’ (European Commission, 2020, 14 emphasis added)

Western identification of liberalism as a necessary dimension of (good) regionalism may also seem to miss the point from some cultural-historical perspectives. For example, while the design of the African Union and of other arrangements across Africa is so closely linked to Europe (whether as an emulation of the EU model or the transformation of colonial structures), some argue that regional organisations should be understood in terms of community-building in opposition to Europe, and not necessarily, if at all, of liberal values. ‘Formal regional organizations in Africa are best conceptualized as instruments to build a regional community that will empower African states vis-à-vis the European “Other” [...] ‘community building does not require or imply liberal values. As can be seen by national and sub-national communities all over the world, liberalism has no relationship with the establishment of a sense of ‘we’. Liberalism is simply one dimension along which states may choose to distinguish “Us” from the “Other”.’ (Mumford, 2021)

4. Perspectives for Comparative Regionalism

Where does all this leave comparative regionalism in the sense of lesson-drawing across regions, and the pursuit of theory-informed comparative frameworks to help build appropriate governance capacities?

4.1 Global Values and Regional Instruments

The evidence suggests that the functional mechanisms of regional governance are not dependent upon formalised recognition of liberal-democratic values. That is, it does not seem necessary for all such values (even if there were any accepted list of these across ‘the West’) to be respected in order to obtain the stability of ambitious regional arrangements, and certainly not to achieve many regional developmental goals. It had been assumed that democracies were not only more capable of cooperating; they would also be more willing to pool autonomy and delegate authority in the first place. Empirical research, however, has found little evidence that the regime type of membership matters for delegation of powers and pooling of sovereignty as instruments in regional governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2015; Cottiero et al., 2024). As noted below, Putin’s Russia explicitly invoked ‘universal principles of integration’ as underpinning the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the mid-2010’s even as the civilizational distancing and potential conflict with the West advanced.

The fact that there appear to be politically neutral instruments of regional governance may be seen to have a ‘dark side’ (Debre, 2021). Authoritarian regionalism may serve the interests of non-democratic regimes (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018;

²² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

Obydenkova and Libman, 2019). In one formulation, international organizations ‘perform three widely-recognized functions: pooling of resources; solving coordination and collective action problems; and legitimation. In the case of authoritarian [*Regional International Organizations*] RIOs, these functions are leveraged to support authoritarian rule and undermine democracy.’ In today’s context of geopolitical and civilizational rivalries, regional arrangements may thus be perceived not only as possible sources of welfare, but also as instruments of competition: ‘strengthening the influence of democratic institutions may require building alternative organizations, strengthening existing organizations whose interests are more closely aligned with U.S. policy’ (Cottiero and Haggard, 2021).

Across the world, regional arrangements are strongly coloured by civilizational projections or ideological alliances, shaped by geopolitical rivalries and security interests, or caught up in a web of inherited overlap and vested interests. This context suggests that the best starting point for rationalization and mutual learning at the regional level may be a combination of neutral multilateral frameworks and practice-based exchanges from the bottom up, rather than direct comparison of institutional arrangements as a whole (while being cautious about the question of universal values).

4.2 The Indispensable Multilateral Framework for Rationalization

Two examples may illustrate the potential of multilateral frameworks to achieve the indispensable first step of rationalizing (trans) regional arrangements, as well as the challenges faced in doing so.

First, as already indicated, there has been a multiplicity of uncoordinated projects to build Eurasian transport corridors. Already in 2015 the UN Economic Commission for Europe Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics noted that cooperation between the numerous initiatives for transport corridors between Europe and Asia is ‘very low or non-existent’.²³ The UN’s Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) produced a study report in 2017 on the Comprehensive Planning of Eurasian Transport Corridors to Strengthen the Intra- and Inter-Regional Transport Connectivity. This identified great numbers of overlaps and proposed rationalizing the ongoing projects into a common framework with Northern, Central and Southern Corridors. It submitted proposals for an institutional structure for the governance and management of Eurasian transport corridors including ‘various types of models for corridor management or corridor governance. One type of model can be the establishment of a *Transport Corridor Authority*, with a clear mandate given by its member states concerning the development of the transport corridor and related transport network. Another type of model is a *Transport Corridor Coordination Committee*, with less far-reaching powers and authority, which aims publicize and coordinate initiatives related to the development of a transport corridor. A third type of model is a *Transport Corridor Observatory*, which would normally have as its main activities the collection, processing and dissemination of relevant information on infrastructure and operations along the corridor, and the monitoring of its performance; often the private sector, NGOs and knowledge institutions play an important role in such a transport corridor observatory.’ These proposals were accompanied by sample templates with draft Memorandums of Understanding for each corridor (ESCAP Transport Division, 2017). It does not appear that this exemplary rational design proposal was pursued further.

Another case is that of the recent surge in Digital Trade Provisions in Preferential Trade Agreements, and new Digital Economy Agreements across the Asia-Pacific. This regulatory heterogeneity and fragmentation creates the risk of ‘a new ‘noodle bowl’ of inconsistent agreements’ that is particularly harmful for smaller firms and less developed countries. Again, it is the UN that can offer an overall framework to help enhance interoperability. ‘countries should refer to and build upon existing international standards and instruments when developing their domestic regulatory environment. For example, countries are encouraged to adopt the existing [*United Nations Commission on International Trade Law*] UNCITRAL model laws related to electronic commerce, including the model law on electronics transferable records, as well as relevant UN/CEFACT technical standards for electronic business. Similarly, at the multilateral and regional level, countries should also actively participate in existing multilateral or regional cooperation frameworks and agreements, before considering creating new ones.’ (Du et al., 2023)

²³ ECE/TRANS/2018/3 of 12 December 2017.

4.3 Practice-Based Approaches

Recommendations such as those given by Söderbaum and Stapel (2022) - Build strong and effective institutions; Ensure national benefits and national buy-in; Diagnose and manage inter-organisational overlaps; Dismantle dysfunctional ROs - are necessary and useful guiding principle in the case of Africa, for example. Yet these objectives are going to be hugely complex and sensitive even bilaterally, as explained in the detailed discussion of the challenges facing rationalization between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) provided by Biyers and Dieye (2022). It is probably the case that 'Africa should 'put [...] pragmatism over idealism by leveraging and reinforcing existing regional and national institutions to implement the CFTA, rather than creating new, idealistic alternatives.' (UNECA, 2017) This is especially the case in view of weak overarching frameworks for coordination and the availability of support from extra-regional donors.

Change is more likely to arise in the context of addressing specific issues than through general exchanges about overall institutional arrangements. The World Bank Group thus now adopts a 'more calibrated and strategic approach' towards the RECs. It proposes to 'work with the RECs on an ongoing basis through diagnostic analysis, engagement in the development and choices of policies, coordinating and managing the processes of advancing and implementing a specific agenda. [...] 'Any institutional systemic issues would need to be addressed along with actions to improve specific challenges facing projects.' They also propose to promote comparison of experiences across RECs in order 'to promote an iterative process of learning by doing' (World Bank Group, 2020). In the same sense, '[a] more realistic understanding of where and why countries engage in regional integration, and though improved monitoring of actual engagement can help identify where to support countries in their efforts. But peer pressure and learning across regions can also play a role.' (Biyers et al, 2018)

There are many publicly available cases of good practice in cross-regional comparison at the level of specific projects and commitments. One good example is the research methodology for the consultancy on 'The Role of Regional Infrastructure in Promoting Green Economies in the East African Community'. The first general objective is to 'Understand experiences from elsewhere in the world where regional infrastructure development has been used to promote a transition to a green economy', including what processes, investments, actors and policy processes were employed, and discussing with regional stakeholders how these lessons might be applied in the EAC (RTI International, 2018).

These kinds of approach can be further applied in more general interregional comparative exercises. The World Bank has promoted exchanges of best practices on regional integration in the health, environment, agriculture, and transport sectors, and regional training centres with institutionalized training programs were established in the health and transport sectors in Europe and Central Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2019).

Cross-sectoral discussions based on empirical assessments are essential. Recent examples include the studies on functional cooperation in the environment, security, migration, health, education, culture, science, energy, water management and social policy (as well on core economic policy areas such as trade liberalization, tax and market integration) in the UNU-CRIS Handbook on Regional Cooperation and Integration (De Lombaerde, 2024).

On the one hand, they help refine parameters and understand risks for comparison - for example, the 'attribution problem' in the case that regional policies intersect with national policies and global developments (Chou et al, 2024) - as well as illustrating general points such as the vital role of political commitment, leadership and mutual trust, as well as resources, for the effectiveness of regional policies. On the other hand, this is the level at which mutual learning may be most feasible, as well as innovative, and at which regional organizations may be most helpful in creating spaces for these processes of interaction and dialogue, illustrating 'the variety of approaches taken when adapting global norms and policy frameworks to regional contexts' (Kaasch et al, 2024).

5. Conclusions

This paper has set out to consider how, in an age of conflict and civilizationism, comparison between different experiences across the world can be used to contribute to the better realization of welfare-enhancing regional arrangements in practice.

One conclusion is that a direct comparison between regional governance arrangements is probably not the most fruitful way to achieve this objective. This is partly because of the practical obstacles posed by the existence of overlapping organizations and multiple interests, and partly because of the political complexities and sensitivities related to competing interests and perhaps values. Indeed it is worth reflecting on whether the consolidation and delimitation of deep regional arrangements should always be seen as a desirable goal. Overlap could be seen as preferable to mutual exclusion and conflict, while in practice, the regional level may often be better understood as only one level in global governance.

At present, there is clearly no consensus when it comes to the idea of global values, including the role of regional orders in international affairs. In the meantime, multilateral frameworks offer the best hope of trying to rationalize and improve things at regional level without conflict. And it may even be the case that constructive exchanges at this level could help counter geopolitical divisions at the global level.

The SDGs are an obvious framework within which to promote mutual learning between regions in a neutral, practice-oriented perspective. This is already taking place within the UN framework itself through the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and corresponding regional forums (for example, the 2024 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development). These aim to assess progress and exchange knowledge, best practices, and policy solutions to support the 2030 Agenda, in line with regional priorities. The fact that assessments are based on inputs from independent bodies or Voluntary National Reviews should help maintain perceptions of respect and cultural neutrality.

This is also a perspective that may permit a different kind of functional comparison at the regional level, in terms of the added value of regional arrangements between the multilateral level and the local. This would not presume to compare welfare results (it is virtually impossible to measure the added value of particular kinds of regional institutional arrangements in terms of economic and social indicators); regime stability (that is, the ability of the arrangements to hold the project together, by whatever means); or governance quality (transparency, participation and accountability, as well as the impact of the regional arrangements on national democratic governance).

A valuable contribution in this respect has already been made within the GLOBE Project (the European Union and the Future of Global Governance) by a team from Leuven and Djakarta. They look at the SDGs as a new form of goal-setting global governance and examine the role of regional organizations in the global governance for sustainability as an important bridge and broker between the international level and the level of member states. They identify four roles: formulating and translating global vision to local context; socializing and mobilizing resources and supports; coordinating (horizontal and vertical) with other actors to ensure policy coherence monitoring and reporting progress (Marx et al., 2021).

This approach could be developed further with a view to reaching possible capacity-building recommendations. This could include consideration of how the UN regional commissions could be reinforced in their role as 'brokers' in interaction with regional organizations (Bogers, 2023).

It could also permit much more sophisticated and relevant (as well as neutral) forms of comparison between Europe and the rest of the world. Reference is generally made to a singular 'EU model', meaning the supranational construction that has been built on the basis of the original 'Community method'. Yet this is not the only or even the most appropriate framework for comparison in areas of functional and developmental cooperation (as compared to the political framework for integration or the hard core of economic and monetary union).

On the one hand, Europe has had other experiences of subregional cooperation that have produced relevant results. This is particularly the case of Nordic Cooperation, which notably succeeded, without any supranational bodies, in establishing a passport union and common labour market as well as important forms of deep functional cooperation, whereas the EU, with all

its supranational powers, has struggled. Nordic countries are global leaders in this context.²⁴ The comparison would not lie so much in the substance, given the huge gap in circumstances between these countries and most of the world, but in the method (Halonen et al., 2017). Moreover, it would, in general, be a positive step in comparative regionalism to offer this alternative ‘mirror’ for regionalist thinking: a comparative perspective oriented more ‘horizontally’ around societal, interparliamentary and transgovernmental realities rather than ‘vertically’ in terms of formal structures with hierarchical levels of authority.

On the other hand, it may be overlooked in other regions (and in some academic analyses) that even within the European Union, there has, since the early 1990s, in fact been a great diversification and experimentation in methods. The EU does not operate by supranational law alone. It uses a range of multilevel cooperative structures that entail various combinations of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ governance elements according to the particular characteristics and political sensitivity of the issue to be addressed. In many sectors of relevance to other regions, the EU does not have supranational competence but has evolved a variety of actions to harmonise national implementation and support capacity-building, including mutual learning (Best, 2021). These approaches could be used also in interregional contexts with a view to drawing lessons from both the successes and the failures of EU experiences. In the same sense, it could be of value to explore, in the perspective of SDG implementation, a politically neutral approach to functional comparison based in principles of multilevel policy integration.

References

- Acharya, Amitav. 2014. ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies’. *International Studies Quarterly* 58(4): 647–59.
- Acharya, Amitav. 2018. *The End of American World Order*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Polity.
- Acharya, Amitav. 2020. ‘The Myth of the “Civilization State”: Rising Powers and the Cultural Challenge to World Order’. *Ethics & International Affairs* 34(2): 139–56.
- Allison, Graham. 2017. ‘China vs. America: Managing the Next Clash of Civilizations’. *Foreign Affairs* 96(5): 80–89.
- Attinà, Fulvio, and Yi Feng. 2023. ‘China’s World Policy at the Time of the War in Ukraine’. In *China and World Politics in Transition, Global Power Shift*, eds. Fulvio Attinà and Yi Feng. Cham: Springer Nature, 1–9.
- Babarinde, Olufemi. 2007. ‘The EU as a Model for the African Union: The Limits of Imitation’. *Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series* 7(2).
- Best, Edward. 2006. ‘Regional Integration and (Good) Governance: Are Common Standards and Indicators Possible?’ In *Assessment and Measurement of Regional Integration*, Routledge/Warwick Studies in Globalisation, ed. Philippe De Lombaerde. Routledge, 183–2014.
- Best, Edward. 2021. *Multilevel Administration and Policy Integration*. https://www.eipa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EIPA_Making-European-Policies-Work-Multilevel-Administration-and-Policy-Integration-_paper_Edward-Best.pdf.
- Bettiza, Gregorio, Derek Bolton, and David Lewis. 2023. ‘Civilizationism and the Ideological Contestation of the Liberal International Order’. *International Studies Review* 25(2): viad006.
- Biyers, Bruce, and Cheikh Tidiane Dieye. 2022. *Regional Integration in West Africa: Wasteful Overlaps or Necessary Options?* Maastricht: ECDPM.
- Bogers, Maya. 2023. ‘Integrating Global Sustainability Governance. How the Sustainable Development Goals Impact Institutional and Policy Integration at the Global Level’. PhD thesis, Utrecht University.
- Börzel, Tanja A., and Thomas Risse. 2016. ‘Three Cheers for Comparative Regionalism’. In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse. Oxford University Press, 621–48.
- Chatterjee, Shibashis, and Udayan Das. 2023. ‘India’s Civilizational Arguments in South Asia: From Nehruvianism to Hindutva’. *International Affairs* 99(2): 475–94.
- Chou, Meng-Hsuan, Jeroen Huisman, and Maria Pilar Lorenzo. 2024. ‘Regional Cooperation in Higher Education’. In *Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration*, ed. Philippe De Lombaerde. Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 266–88.
- Colom-Jaén, Artur, and Óscar Mateos. 2022. ‘China in Africa: Assessing the Consequences for the Continent’s Agenda for Economic Regionalism’. *Politics and*
- 24 <https://pub.nordregio.org/r-2023-4-the-nordic-region-and-the-2030-agenda/the-nordic-region-and-the-sustainable-development-goals.html>

Governance 10(2): 61–70.

Cottiero, Christina, Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Stephan Haggard, Lauren Prather, and Christina J. Schneider. 2024. 'Illiberal Regimes and International Organizations'. *The Review of International Organizations*

Cottiero, Christina, and Stephen Haggard. 2021. 'The Rise of Authoritarian Regional International Organizations'. IGCC Working Papers. https://ucigcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/igcc-working-paper_haggard-cottiero_aug-2021.pdf.

De Lombaerde, Philippe, ed. 2024. *Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing.

Debre, Maria J. 2021. 'The Dark Side of Regionalism: How Regional Organizations Help Authoritarian Regimes to Boost Survival'. *Democratization* 28(2): 394–413.

Dragneva, Rilka, and Kataryna Wolczuk. 2012. 'Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?' *Chatham House Briefing Papers* (2012/01).

Du, Runqiu, Yann Duval, Maria Semenova, and Natnicha Sutthivana. 2023. 'Multilateral and Regional Cooperation Trends in Digital Trade in the Asia-Pacific Region'. ARTNeT Working Paper Series (227).

Eisenman, Joshua, and Eric Heginbotham. 2020. 'China's Relations with Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East'. In *China and the World*, ed. David Shambaugh. Oxford University Press, 291–312.

ESCAP Transport Division. 2017. *Comprehensive Planning of Eurasian Transport Corridors to Strengthen the Intra- and Inter-Regional Transport Connectivity*. <https://www.unescap.org/resources/comprehensive-planning-eurasian-transport-corridors-strengthen-intra-and-inter-regional>.

Futák-Campbell, Beatrix, ed. 2021. *Globalizing Regionalism and International Relations*. Bristol University Press.

Futák-Campbell, Beatrix, and Jue Wang. 2021. 'Is There Such a Thing as a Confucianist Chinese Foreign Policy? A Case Study of the Belt and Road Initiative'. In *Globalizing Regionalism and International Relations*, ed. Beatrix Futák-Campbell. Bristol University Press, 153–79.

Gast, Ann-Sophie. 2017. 'Regionalism in Eurasia: Explaining Authority Transfers to Regional Organizations'. KFG Working Paper (82).

Hall, Ian. 2019. *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*. Bristol University Press.

Halonen, Mikko, Åsa Persson, Susanna Sepponen, Clarisse Kehler Siebert, Marika Bröckl, Anu Vaahtera, Shane Quinn, Caspar Trimmer, and Antti Isokangas. 2017. *Sustainable Development Action – the Nordic Way*. 2017:523. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.

Haubrich Seco, Miguel. 2011. 'Decoupling Trade from Politics: The EU and Region-Building in the Andes'. IAI Working Papers.

He, Baogang. 2020. 'Regionalism as an Instrument for Global Power Contestation: The Case of China'. *Asian Studies Review* 44(1): 79–96.

Heng, Cui. 2023. 'Shanghai Spirit Continues to Be Core of SCO's Appeal Two Decades on'. *The Global Times*.

Jetschke, Anja, and Tobias Lenz. 2013. 'Does Regionalism Diffuse? A New Research Agenda for the Study of Regional Organizations'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 20(4): 626–37.

Jetschke, Anja, and Philomena Murray. 2012. 'Diffusing Regional Integration: The EU and Southeast Asia'. *West European Politics* 35(1): 174–91.

Kaasch, Alexandra, Amanda Shriwise, Tuba Agartan, Sarah Cook, Jeremy Seekings, and Rangsan Sukhampaha. 2024. 'Regional Social Policies: Aspirations, Vernacularisation, or New Forms of Solidarity?' In *Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration*, Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 243–65.

Kazharski, Aliaksei. 2019. *Eurasian Integration and the Russian World: Regionalism as an Identitary Enterprise*. Budapest New York: Central European University Press.

Kluiver, Jana de. 2024. 'Can FOCAC Adapt to Meet Africa's Long-Term Needs?' *ISS Today*. h

Lenz, Tobias. 2012. 'Spurred Emulation: The EU and Regional Integration in Mercosur and SADC'. *West European Politics* 35(1): 155–73.

Lenz, Tobias. 2021. 'Theorizing Interorganizational Influence from the European Union: A Diffusion Framework'. In *Interorganizational Diffusion in International Relations*, Oxford University Press, 51–80.

Lenz, Tobias, and Mariel Reiss. 2024. 'Globalising the Study of Diffusion: Multiple Sources and the East African Community'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 31(11): 3703–31.

- Libman, Alexander, and Anastassia V. Obydenkova. 2018. 'Understanding Authoritarian Regionalism'. *Journal of Democracy* 29(4): 151–65.
- Malamud, Andres. 2018. 'Overlapping Regionalism, No Integration: Conceptual Issues and Latin American Experiences'. *Política Internacional* 3(6): 46–59.
- Marx, Axel, Sukmawani Bela Pertiwi, Charline Depoorter, Michiel Hoornick, Tirta Nugraha Mursitama, Kari Otteburn, and Lili Yulyadi Arnakim. 2021. 'What Role for Regional Organizations in Goal-Setting Global Governance? An Analysis of the Role of the European Union and ASEAN in the Sustainable Development Goals'. *Global Public Policy and Governance* 1(4): 421–45.
- Mumford, Densua. 2021. 'Building Regional Communities: The Role of Regional Organizations in Africa'. In *Globalizing Regionalism and International Relations*, ed. Beatrix Futák-Campbell. Bristol University Press, 77–101.
- Murray, Philomena, and Edward Moxon-Browne. 2013. 'The European Union as a Template for Regional Integration? The Case of ASEAN and Its Committee of Permanent Representatives'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 51(3): 522–37.
- Murthy, Padmaja. 1999. 'The Gujral Doctrine and Beyond'. *Strategic Analysis* 23(4).
- Nolte, Detlef. 2018. 'Costs and Benefits of Overlapping Regional Organizations in Latin America: The Case of the OAS and UNASUR'. *Latin American Politics and Society* 60(1): 128–53.
- Obydenkova, Anastassia, and Alexander Libman. 2019. *Authoritarian Regionalism in the World of International Organizations: Global Perspective and the Eurasian Enigma*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Otele, Oscar M. 2020. 'China, Region-Centric Infrastructure Drives and Regionalism in Africa'. *South African Journal of International Affairs* 27(4): 511–32.
- Risse, Thomas. 2016. *The Diffusion of Regionalism*. In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse. Oxford University Press, 87–108.
- Roy, Pradipta. 2015. 'Decoding India's "Neighbourhood First" Policy'. *Indian Journal of Political Science* 76(4): 1024–29.
- Söderbaum, Fredrik. 2019. 'Rethinking Regionalism in the 21st Century'. In *Global Politics in the 21st Century: Between Regional Cooperation and Conflict*, eds. Andrzej Mania, Marcin Grabowski, and Tomasz Pugacewicz. Berlin: Peter Lang, 25–40.
- Söderbaum, Fredrik, and Sören Stapel. 2022. *Agenda 2063 and the Role of Africa's Overlapping Regional Organisations*. Maastricht: ECDPM.
- Song, Weiqing, and Weining Ai. 2023. 'China's Vision for a Future World Order and Its Implications for Global Governance'. In *China and World Politics in Transition, Global Power Shift*, eds. Fulvio Attinà and Yi Feng. Cham: Springer Nature, 13–29.
- Stephen, Matthew D. 2021. 'China's New Multilateral Institutions: A Framework and Research Agenda'. *International Studies Review* 23(3): 807–34.
- Van der Loo, Guillaume, Peter Van Elsuwege, and Roman Petrov. 2014. *The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: Assessment of an Innovative Legal Instrument*. Florence: EUI.
- Wojczewski, Thorsten. 2017. 'India's Vision of World Order: Multi-Alignment, Exceptionalism and Peaceful Co-Existence'. *Global Affairs* 3(2): 111–23.
- World Bank. 2019. *Two to Tango: An Evaluation of World Bank Group Support to Fostering Regional Integration*. Independent Evaluation Group. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
- World Bank Group. 2020. 'Supporting Africa's Recovery and Transformation. Regional Integration and Cooperation Assistance Strategy Update for the Period FY21–FY23'.
- Zemnek, Ladislav. 2024. 'A Civilisational Turn: China and Russia at the Forefront'. *Valdai Opinions*.

Comparative Regionalism in an Age of Conflict

UNU-CRIS Working Paper #1 2025

Copyright © United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies 2025

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations University.

Published by: United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies