

In Search of Conceptual Platforms for East-West Cooperation, Global and Regional Integration Projects

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This article seeks to reflect on some theoretical and practical issues raised at the Conference “Common Foreign and Security Policy of European Union. Middle East and Iran,” organized by Allameh Tabataba’i University, with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency – EACEA). The conference took place in Tehran, Iran, on 21 December 2020. The paper looks into aspects of the conceptual platforms for East-West cooperation, global and regional integration projects, and is intended as an appeal for intensifying pluralistic joint academic research, culturally and politically unbiased, to theoretically generalize, compare and make available to a wider public the experience of the EU and other institutionalized regional communities, in order to foresee the possible and most viable forms of coordination of strategic (and tactical) policies within the developing regionalization processes. The main proposed methods of academic research are typologization, comparative and contrasting analysis, extrapolation.

Keywords: global and regional integration, integration and cooperation projects, multilateral cooperation, common foreign, security policy

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Introduction

The creation of the Global World is a “natural process,” though it is also a “guided process” involving actors, choices and values. The currently dominant model of Globalization, encompassing various regionalization projects within it, is an undeniable fact, though the forms of global integration and regionalization are to a large extent molded by the dominant socio-political and economic philosophies (not just by “pure

natural forces”). In recent decades, especially after the final collapse of the Eurasian and East European Socialist Block in 1991, it appeared to the majority, at least for a time, that only one of those value-forms could and should become globally dominant. Francis Fukuyama summarized and condensed this attitude when he declared history itself to be at an end, given what he claimed was a complete absence of viable alternatives to an entirely americanised code of values which were henceforth to apply to the entire world (Fukuyama, 1989; Fukuyama, 1992). Yet as Jacques Attali (Attali, 1991) quite rightly noted, the application and enforcement of such a universalist value-code implied not only the shutting down of alternatives, but the stratification of experience within the new world order requiring the emergence of winners and losers. Today, many theorists continue to hold the view that a neo-liberal, americanized version of monopoly capitalism, underpinned by heavily militarized politics, is the best and final version of the development of the Global dynamic world. We do not share this view.

Meanwhile, there are a number of competing theories (models) of Globalization and regionalization – of Alter-Globalization – premised on ideas that envisage a “more fair” and diverse world, with significantly reduced power vested in transnational corporations and challenging the hegemony of Anglo-Saxon (American) civilizational predominance in economics, culture and other spheres (Buzgalin, s.a.; Scerri, 2012). These alternative conceptions include left social-democratic, traditionalist-conservative, ecological (“green”), and other “ideologized” interpretations of possible and desirable global and regional development.

One particularly powerful, regionally-entrenched, a traditionalist-conservative alternative philosophy of world development is provided by radical Islam – of the “Muslim Brotherhood” (Manne, 2016). More significant, both philosophically and politically, however, the Peoples Republic of China has over recent decades emerged as the most powerful competitor to the dominant neo-liberal version of Globalization and regionalization, with its inherent Americanization and Europeanization. While considerable academic attention is now paid to the programmatic concepts and practice of the People’s Republic of China – articulated, for example, through “The Community of Shared Future for Mankind” (Xi, 2017) and “The Belt and Road” initiative (Belt and Road Cooperation, 2019), the PRC development model involves an expansion of directed capitalism within a broader societal system in which political control, expressed through the Communist Party of China, dominates economic, cultural and social life.

In such conditions, in particular regions of the world, there are special civilizational and institutional attractors for a number of countries bordering “more successful” entities participating in a dynamic process of regionalization and Globalization. For the wide strata of Ukraine and many other countries, the European Union is such an attractor and a source of inspiration due to its expressed values and institutional models.

Ukraine, as a social organism, as a holistic entity, faces serious challenges of finding its own place in the contemporary world through joining certain regional and global integration projects with a decent and worthy role in them. It is only for some specific segments of the national or “imported” political and economic elites everything is already clear and “defined for eternity,” “cast in metal.” Choices are still to be made and can not be limited (at least for a long time and for all) by the manipulative political technologies or reduced to one-dimensional simplified scenarios. Impulses for “a wider look,” for multi-dimensional approaches, often come from being exposed to fixed sets of institutionalized beliefs and deeply-rooted one-sided practices of particular powerful international actors.

Based on the example of one interesting, symbolic and symptomatic conference, this paper is aimed at attracting attention to the possible application of the seemingly “unexpected” (though in fact naturally presupposed) optics: while the organisers of the Tehran conference and the majority of participants were concentrated on the assessment of the potential of major international actors, there is another layer for cognitive, as well as for creative political process (for research and practical actions): finding how the experience of the particular existing institutional model of integration and regionalisation can be applied in a variety of other geographic, cultural-civilizational and political contexts.

For the participants of the Conference “Common Foreign and Security Policy of European Union, Middle East and Iran,” organized by Allameh Tabataba’i University, with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency – EACEA) held in Tehran, Iran, on 21st of December 2020, it was clear that there were two major inherent components in the concept and content of the conference:

(A). The traditional explanation of the institutional background of the EU: decision-making and structure of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of European Union; different views on CFSP; CFSP and integration process in Europe; changes and evolutions of CFSP.

(B). The present and the prospective role of the EU through the application of the CFSP in solving (or assisting in the resolution of) serious regional crises: in Middle Eastern states (Syria, Palestine and Yemen); Iran (particularly the Iran nuclear deal, the as yet uncertain policy positions of the Biden administration towards Iran); and broader areas permitting of extended cooperation between Iran and the EU (International Conference, 2020).

The present paper also presents an appeal for the intensification of pluralistic joint academic research, culturally and politically unbiased, to theoretically generalize, compare and make available to a wider public the experience of the EU and other institutionalized regional communities in order to foresee the possible and most viable forms of coordination of policies at multiple levels, ranging from the strategic to the more mundane day-to-day “grass-roots” policies within the developing processes of guided regionalization. The academic research within the proposed approach should include complex multi-focus and multi-component methods of typologization, comparative and contrasting analysis and extrapolation.

Competing Regional Integration Models: Quo Vadis?

The EU is not and has never been static. Throughout its history, the European Union has grown its membership, successfully expanded its institutional repertoire, its political and its cultural reach. It has proven attractive to numerous countries which have achieved full membership and others that continue to pursue partnership status by presenting itself as an entity worth joining and sometimes even just “dissolving in.”

In the post-Soviet space, the EU has shown itself to be particularly attractive to the currently dominant political and economic elites in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and their supporters. In contemporary (i.e., post-2014) Ukraine, these post-revolutionary elites have even managed to secure amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine (see, in particular, amendments to the preamble and articles 85, 102, 116), resulting in several uniforms, congruent clauses “confirming the European identity of the Ukrainian people and the irreversibility of the European and Euro-Atlantic course of Ukraine” and adherence to “determination of the principles of internal and foreign policy, realization of the strategic course of the state on acquiring full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the European Union

and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization” (Legal news in Ukraine, 2019; Ukraine President, 2019; Poroshenko, 2018). The current President of Ukraine and his newly-created party, “Servant of the People,” who won elections in 2019 (President, 2020), continue the same geopolitical and geo-cultural line.

It is worthwhile to distinguish between different types of states for which there is a real or theoretical possibility of becoming a member of the EU. Among them, one can distinguish:

(1) Applicants for fully-fledged membership status, formally equal to the key (“core”) EU member states, but retaining significant autonomy in various policy fields, in a manner similar to that currently adopted by Poland and Hungary. Such entrant states would most seek to retain a “sovereign,” often “*Fronde*-type” control over both domestic and foreign policy, while remaining fully within the EU. A significant portion of the electorate of modern Turkey actively seeks such status for their country, though the possibility of this being achieved by Turkey is not great.

(2) Applicants for the role of a “junior partner”: calm, not particularly ambitious, but seeking the advantages of formal union, while recognising that their putative roles and status will rarely be dominant. Such states can demonstrate the necessary competencies for the professional, balanced, reasonable protection of the interests of their country and people. Examples include Malta, Cyprus and most likely also Slovenia and Slovakia. Serbia appears to be anticipating this type of status, at least initially, should accession be achieved. Prior to the Ukrainian revolution of 2013-2014, the ruling strata, in concert with the political and economic elites, sought this type of membership status, arguing that a discrete and particularistic “European perspective for Ukraine” should be accepted by prospective partners within the EU.

(3) Those who agree to the role of dependent, managed and directed quasi-partners, but in practice, an informal status of “protectorate.” Such states are unlikely to enjoy any real “actorness” being, in effect merely instruments of expansion of EU infrastructure and policies. Among the current contenders for such status are Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

(4) A peculiar variant of the applicant-state type (principally of the type discussed in paragraph 3 above, but which might be distinguished as an independent type) is a state whose authorities pursue a specific “self-sacrificial policy” and are ready to sacrifice the fundamental strategic interests of their people and country in pursuit of a fallacious or illusory “common cause” (based on a belief in “common interests”) of Europe and the West as a whole. This can be manifested, for example, in the readiness to provide their territory, their economic system and the consciousness of their people – the culture, the mass media (or rather, the system of state propaganda, and the “national” virtual space of the Internet) as a field of almost eschatological battles with the geopolitical and geo-economic opponents of the EU, which is viewed as no more than an interstate association. In the current period ruling Ukrainian elites attribute to their country such a self-sacrificial role as a bastion of the Global (i.e., democratic) West, cast in opposition to the “authoritarian” post-Soviet regimes and undemocratic forces more generally.

Each of the above categories of potential applicant-states may be viewed as a Weberian ideal type, that is to say, providing a highly generalised description but not conforming to the specific characteristics of any particular accession applicant. Moreover, the grounds for seeking accession, particularly where a national self-sacrificial status is introduced, can be especially dangerous. This was recognised by former American Secretary of State and geostrategist Henry Kissinger, who drew attention to the danger

and even perniciousness of attempts to experiment with such status and such a historical choice (Goldberg, 2016). Though produced several years ago, Kissinger's remark was dismissive of the idea that Ukraine should engage in such geostrategic self-sacrifice, arguing instead that it would be preferable for Ukraine to adopt a "balancing" role as a "bridge" between the West and the East, but not as a peripheral part of each of them (Goldberg, 2016; Yakushik, 2019: 47).

In preparing to apply for accession to the EU, leading national actors and elites may engage in hard, rational analysis of economic, political and other advantages and disadvantages. Alternatively, particularistic interests and even dominant national fantasies may dominate discussions. Yet even where the status of such preparatory work is recognised within the EU, and a view reached on the classification of the applicant-state in terms of the above typology, the status of ultimate accession agreements need not conform to an "all-or-nothing" response. A seldom-discussed possibility may be an "asymmetric" Agreement on Association – asymmetric as to the real rights and obligations, limitations (restrictions) and opportunities, distribution of political and economic roles of the parties involved, see e.g., Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine (Association Agreement, 2014) which more precisely is called Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part (Association Agreement, 2014).

For a long time, the political and legal nature of the EU in the academic literature (in legal and political science) has been the subject of intense discussion and dispute. Meanwhile, the general spectrum of relevant statements and assessments ranging from defining the EU as a "close international union," "interstate union," "international organization," to a "decentralized union state" in the form of "confederation" and even "federation."

According to the author of this article, the EU as a sovereign political and legal entity contains, in a rather bizarre form, the features of a federation, a confederation, and an interstate (international) union. After all, distinguishing different types of commonwealths (unions) of states (Yakushik, 2012: 49-51), we can conclude that among them may be:

(1) Purely interstate unions (political, cultural, civilizational, economic, etc.) involving the comprehensive merging of the sovereignty of formerly independent states. (Winston Churchill proposed such a merger of British and French sovereignty in 1940).

(2) Interstate unions that require the creation of supranational political and legal structures, in which legitimacy derives from legal treaties rather than from any mandate provided by the general citizenry while permitting or requiring retention of elements of independent statehood, whether military, legal/judicial, fiscal, etc. In such cases, state sovereignty may be dispersed or diluted, though "Statehood" may be at least nominally retained. In reality, such hybrid creations would need to be examined on an autonomy/merged statehood axis. In extreme cases, former states might come to represent no more than a particular form of decentralised government, regardless of the formal terminology, official narrative, or academic conceptualisations employed at a national or supra-national level.

Similar considerations apply to different types of confederations, some of which are varieties of decentralized forms of government, while others are types of interstate unions that cannot be assessed as a specific form of government, but only as an interstate union that has no features of its own statehood, although their creators use this term "confederation" for the official name of the interstate union, or at least some researchers use this term to denote the essence and scientific interpretation of the nature of interstate structures created on the basis of such a union.

Such a broadly outlined framework implies a continuum of possibilities ranging from national autonomous statehood at one extreme (though full autonomy is best seen as chimeric), through confederacy, to limited statehood/merged autonomy, to full federation involving the collapse and merger of autonomy and state sovereignty. Such conceptual considerations become particularly acute when issues are not subject to a clear consensus. For example, in internal matters, EU member states retain autonomous rights over fiscal policy, welfare provision, domestic judicial affairs, and a range of other matters. Yet the history and development of the EU have been heavily marked by internal disputes over both the roles of and relationships between its constituent institutions and the voting procedures employed when deciding on matters of common concern, with some matters being decided on majority votes, others requiring unanimity and others by what is described as “qualified majority” requirements.

However, in matters of external and collective security affairs, member states of the EU, while retaining independent legal personality, are subject to legal and treaty obligations in the conduct of their external affairs and are collectively governed by the requirements of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU. Hence the principal actor in the conduct of external affairs remains the Union. In discharging its duties as a principal actor in the conduct of its external affairs, the EU has developed a comprehensive institutional structure capable of acting at a normative/legal level, with broad technical/operational and cultural/ideological capacities (with the latter including mass-media management and the deployment of “soft power” capacity). Many attempts have been made to analyse the uses of these power arrangements. In the academic, educational and journalistic (general information) literature, there is a fairly wide range of publications that comprehensively consider the issues of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union. Among such publications, the following works should be especially mentioned (Matlary, 2018; The foreign policy, 2021; Howorth, 2014).

Within academic institutions, the field of “European Studies” is now firmly established as a distinct and legitimate discipline. Broadly, academic attention and analysis distinguishes between those aspects of the EU CFSP that deal with “Internal” issues, i.e., those that relate to Western and Central European policy matters, and “External” policies of the EU and its member states involving “other” non-member countries or their regions and other regions of the world.

Finally, there are other, sometimes hidden, levels of the EU CFSP historical experience, ranging between matters of high conceptual and theoretical significance and matters better understood as operating at an applied or practical level. These range across normative and ideological constructs, the uses and abuses of political technologies, organisational and institutional structures and relationships (i.e., both intra- and inter-institutional), and financial/economic. Individually and collectively, these present opportunities for examination and increasing understanding of matters of high conceptual and practical political value with the potential for further independent use and creative development by those interested in the EU CFSP model, whether in its existing or a modified form. Such modifications can be applied in numerous possible ways: whether as attempted improvements to the general model, as correctives to perceived errors of design or application, in terms of applicability in new settings or, through simplification, always depending on the tasks, peculiarities of the region, administrative cultures and time.

The EU has generated a relatively successful and sustainable functioning model of inter-state and inter-institutional intensive and permanent coordination in the area of foreign

relations and security, covering defense, intelligence gathering and dissemination, and related matters. In considering this as a possible development model to be employed elsewhere, it is theoretically important to see a set of typologies of (a) the existing, (b) historically known, (c) possible types of inter-state (including state-like non-sovereign or quasi-sovereign local, regional and “dispersed” entities) coordination of foreign and security policy.

A clear understanding of the EU general model of CFSP and the analysis of particular cases of its application in various regions of the world and in special sectors/segments of

- infrastructural,
- ecological,
- economic,
- cultural (including faith and confessions),
- social (including public health) and
- in various “pure political” issues provide important conceptual and factual material for working out efficient (or at least viable) integration and/or multilateral cooperation projects in different regions of the world and for a number of culturally interconnected (and/or kin) nations, e.g., for:
 - (a) the post-Soviet (especially the post-Soviet Slavic and Turkic) nations (Eurasian Economic Union; Eurasian Economic Commission; The Collective Security Treaty);
 - (b) the Turkic world (with the prospects for its predominant coordination by the present more and more dynamic and ambitious Turkey) (Turkic Council; Gafarli, 2019);
 - (c) the Iranian, Persian-Turkic and Shia world;
 - (d) the Latin-American (or Latin nations’) world;
 - e) the ASEAN countries;
 - (f) the Anglo-Saxon world (which already has efficient security and intelligence coordination named “Five Eyes”) (Zhou, 2020; Manson, 2020);
 - (g) (at some stage theoretically possible) CFSP of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member-countries) (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), etc.

These and other typologically similar projects are often overlapping and competing, but at the same time, they may be in some cases and under some conditions compatible with each other and not antagonistic.

Conclusion

Contemporary Ukraine is not only a conquered prize in a political struggle involving ruling national and international elites. It is also a complex social organism, and as such, it needs multi-level and multi-dimensional strategies of integration into the global space and into various regional spaces.

At one time (in 2013), the Western partners attempted to persuade Ukraine that it needed to choose: either an association with the EU or with the Russian Federation and its interstate structures (Eurasian Economic Union), leaving apart the possible super-intensive plan of strategic cooperation with China which was brought by the then president of Ukraine from his visit to Beijing in December 2013. Recently, post-Brexit, quite similar prescriptions for the UK are now heard from the leaders of continental Western Europe. French President Emmanuel Macron, for example, has warned that Boris Johnson’s government has to decide who its allies are, insisting that “half-pregnant is not a concept.” “What politics does Great

Britain wish to choose? It cannot be the best ally of the US, the best ally of the EU and the new Singapore... It has to choose a model” (Willsher, 2021).

“One-vector” orientation towards joining a particular economic and political union and the closely related defense structures (associations) may be predetermined by strong political factors. The recent history of Ukraine and other East European states shows clearly that there is no absolute predetermination, and there are no “eternal” unions and federate and confederate associations. Both multi-vector and multi-layered international integration projects are possible practically at any stage. Some significant changes in the international and national (local) environment and the emergence of new (cultural, political and economic) attractors and new integration projects (or their updated versions or aspects) can lead to serious changes in the consciousness of the national elites and in the public preference. Different integrationist projects will inevitably compete, as will various projections of isolationist or semi-isolationist visions of the nation’s developmental strategies. In any event, well-prepared administrative and intellectual elites will require comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the experience and potential of various existing, historical and theoretically possible new models of integration.

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