The EU as a Global Player
The Politics of Interregionalism

Edited by
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The EU as a Global Player

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

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

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Preface

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

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

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

Fredrik Söderbaum and Luk van Langenhove, January 2006
Introduction: The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism

FREDRIK SÖDERBAUM* & LUK VAN LANGENHOVE**

1. The Theme
The European Union’s external relations and foreign policies have expanded dramatically since the end of the Cold War and the establishment of the EU
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through the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. Today the EU has relations with virtually every country and most regions in the world. The EU has become a force in international affairs, especially in trade, development cooperation, the promotion of regional integration, democracy and good governance, human rights and, to an increasing extent, also in security policies.

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

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

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

In Asia, the EU is engaged in strong interregional relations with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and also offers support for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) focused on trade integration among South Asian countries. The EU’s exchanges with ASEAN gave birth to a new institutional framework of interregional multidimensional relations with the creation of the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996. The historical ASEM 5 Summit held in Hanoi in October
2004 marked the enlargement of ASEM from 26 to 39 partners through the accession of the ten new EU member states and three new countries from ASEAN that were not yet part of the process: Cambodia, Laos and Burma/Myanmar.

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

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

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

2. Purpose of the Studies

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

One of the central ambitions is to assess whether there is an increasing tendency of regions to assume a stronger role on the world scene and gain in ‘actoriness’. Our concern is first and foremost with the EU, but the degree of actoriness of counterpart regions is also relevant. What brings actoriness and interregionalism together is the fact that, when regions assume actoriness, a
need will necessarily also arise for more organised contacts between the regions, i.e., interregionalism.

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

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

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

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

These questions are both comprehensive and complex. Our starting position is that no single theory can provide satisfactory answers to all the questions. There is a host of different theories and approaches that are helpful in explaining and understanding European integration and the EU’s foreign policies. To some extent we can expect that the dominant theoretical
frameworks, such as realism and liberalism, will make sense of these issues. However, we can also expect constructivism and more critical theoretical perspectives to provide complementary answers, for instance on the role of norms, identities and power relations in these processes. There is a need to clarify, revise and also, to some extent, to generate new theory in order to make sense of the interregional phenomenon, as well as the EU as a global actor. Since the study of interregionalism is at such an early stage of development we have not tried to impose a single or uniform theoretical framework for the individual case studies but, rather, tried to encourage the authors to engage in creative theorizing.

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

3. The Emergence of Interregionalism: a Historical Perspective

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

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

Globalisation, the Nation–state and the Transformation of Westphalia

Today the Westphalian system is challenged and transformed by a number of forces and developments but also, paradoxically, reinforced by them. The most important changes contributing to ‘moving beyond Westphalia’ are
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perhaps the changing nature of its constitutive unit, the sovereign state, in combination with what is conventionally referred to as globalisation.

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

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

Regionalism and the Emergence of Interregionalism

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

In order to avoid the confusion that often arises as a result of mixing temporal, empirical and theoretical notions of ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalisms, we propose the term ‘generations’ of regionalism rather than ‘waves’. The label ‘generation’ refers to empirical qualities and has nothing to do with the “theories of new regionalism” (Söderbaum 2004; Söderbaum & Shaw 2003).
Classifying as ‘generations’ helps to underline the possibility of co–existing patterns of regionalisms with different empirical qualities, while at the same time also acknowledging that some varieties of regionalism build upon previous ‘generations’. The use of ‘generations’ enables us to avoid the often–used dichotomy between ‘old’ and ‘new’ regionalism and a strict temporal division of regionalism at different historical periods. In the authors’ view we are still witnessing the birth of ‘first generation’ agreements, which develop and co–exist next to ‘second’ as well as the more recent ‘third’ generation regional constructions. For instance, many regional projects and regional organisations were initiated during the era of first generation regionalism and were then simply renewed or re–inaugurated (sometimes with a new name and sometimes with different members) in the 1980s and 1990s.

The ‘first generation’ of regionalism often had narrowly defined objectives, and focused first and foremost on trade (or security). An example is the European Economic Community. European economic integration triggered the creation of similar free trade areas and common markets in Africa, Asia and the Americas during the 1960s and early 1970s. Such ‘first–generation' regional integration is still a booming phenomenon. According to Sampson, “As of March 2002, a total of 172 RTAs actively in force had been notified to the GATT or the WTO. ... If RTAs not (or not yet) notified are also taken into account, the total number in force rises to 243” (Sampson 2003: 6).

Although mainly economic in character, the original intentions behind first generation regional agreements may also be political. This was the case with the European Communities: the driving force between the idea of linking the economies of France and Germany was security and the prevention of war, but the tool to achieve these goals was economic integration.

The main characteristic of second–generation regionalism is that it is more complex, comprehensive and political than in the past (Schulz et al. 2001; Söderbaum & Shaw 2003). As pointed out by Hettne, it is a “multidimensional form of integration which includes economic, political, social and cultural aspects and thus goes far beyond the goal of creating region–based free trade regimes or security alliances. Rather, the political ambition of establishing regional coherence and identity seems to be of primary importance” (Hettne 1999, xvi). Second–generation regionalism is based on the close intersectoral connections, for instance that trade and the economy are not isolated from the rest of society. As a result, regionalism also encompasses non–economic matters such as justice, security, the environment, culture and identity. In second–generation regionalism the number, scope, and diversity of regional projects have grown significantly in most parts of the world and they are no longer simply replicas of the early European integration experience.

The emergence of ‘second–generation’ regionalism needs to be historically situated. Telò refers to this as “post–hegemonic regionalism”, emerging within a new and more turbulent world order (Telò 2001). The collapse of the communist regimes not only ended the Cold War and produced an enormous geographical zone of political uncertainty and instability, it also had deep
repercussions for the Westphalian system. While, until the end of the Cold War, regional cooperation was largely a hegemonically imposed phenomenon, it has gradually become propelled by internal factors. According to Telò, what we refer to as second-generation regionalism can be seen as an attempt by states to react to the complex impact of financial, technological and market globalisation on their traditional territorial state power by strengthening regional control when traditional centralised national sovereignty no longer functions, and to bargain collectively with external actors and regions.

The EU is perhaps the most developed example of second-generation regionalism. It is a political model that challenges conventional assumptions about governance and even sovereignty. In fact, second-generation regionalism in Europe and, to some extent, elsewhere in the world is related to a transformation of the nation-state and “the dispersion of authoritative decision–making across multiple territorial levels” (Hooghe & Marks 2001, xi). European integration is a “polity–creating process in which authority and policy–making influence are shared across multiple levels of government — subnational, national, and supranational” (Hooghe & Marks 2001, 2). The multilevel governance model increasingly makes sense of the EU and the European political landscape. The multilevel model reveals a shift of authority in several key areas of policy–making, from national states up to European–level institutions, and at the same time a decentralisation of political authority from the national level down to the subnational level of government.

States are continuing to play important roles in regionalism, but they are integrated within a more multi-tiered and multilevel governance system. Here, it is important to acknowledge that, whereas first-generation regionalism in the 1960s focused primarily upon regional trade integration and was, due to its state–centrism, consistent with the Westphalian order, many of the current patterns of regionalism are more multifaceted and complex, and therefore reinforce the transformation of the Westphalian system.

Second-generation regionalism is to some extent extroverted and linked with globalisation rather than introverted as was the case with first-generation regionalism. This is evident, among other things, in that second-generation projects are stepping stones to, rather than stumbling blocks for multilateral trade. Second–generation frameworks can often be understood in terms of ‘open regionalism’ because the most powerful states and agencies on the world scene enforce such ‘openness’ on weaker regions and countries regardless of whether this promotes economic development or not (and in sharp contrast to the history of western economic development). Nevertheless, even if many regions ‘opened up’ and have become ‘extrovert’ it is not until recently that they have begun to play a role on the international scene. If regions start to become international and global actors, this may have deep repercussions on world order and global governance.

In the authors’ view we are now in the early stages of the development of third–generation regionalism, characterised by a much stronger external orientation of regions, in which regions begin to play a more important role world–wide and in extra–regional affairs on a series of fronts: (i) towards
global international regimes and organisations; (ii) towards other regions; and (iii) towards individual countries in the rest of the world (Van Langenhove & Costea 2004). While in first and second-generation regionalism the focal area is primarily the region itself, third-generation regionalism also implies external operations that can span the whole world.

Third-generation regionalism has at least two main characteristics distinguishing it from previous generations. First, in third-generation regionalism the institutional environment for dealing with ‘out of area’ regional policies is more evident and stronger. As an example, the European Constitution which is temporarily postponed, would give the EU a legal personality and create the first ever regional organisation that has the jurisdiction to act as a supranational organisation within the framework of the United Nations. Second, in third-generation integration, regions become more proactive, engaging in interregional arrangements and agreements that can have effect on relations at the global level. Following a period dominated by the EU in this field, regional organisations from all continents (e.g., ASEAN, Mercosur, Southern African Development Community — SADC) have started to engage in the creation of interregional initiatives. Given the influence of globalisation, there is a rather thin line between second and third-generation regionalism. However, a major distinction lies in the fact that, while the previous generations were aimed at optimising economic and political processes for the regions as such, third-generation regionalism is, by design, oriented more externally and towards shaping global governance.

Interregionalism is no novelty. There are several examples of region-to-region relations between first generation regional arrangements. However, it is our argument that interregionalism is beginning to have deeper ramifications for world order. The differences between the generations of regionalism are not always crystal clear. However, we contend that interregionalism should not simply be understood within the framework of second-generation regionalism. As Gilson correctly points out, interregionalism tends misleadingly to be examined within regionalism, and “regarded simply as a stepping-stone or body of resistance to globalisation” (Gilson 2002, xii). Hence, interregionalism is a new level of interaction and a distinct phenomenon, which needs consideration in its own right.

4. Concepts

There is still no consensus on the main concepts in the study of regionalism, and there is even greater disagreement in the conceptualisation of interregionalism. This is because the research field is in the early stages of development and the research object is still unclear and shifting. The editors’ strategy regarding conceptual elaboration is to state some overall definitions in order to give the authors the opportunity to further develop the concepts for their individual tasks, if and when this is necessary.

In the most general sense, interregionalism signifies the condition or process whereby two regions interact as regions. We want to problematise two aspects of this general definition, which both impact on the way we
understand interregionalism: (i) the actors of interregionalism, and (ii) the delimitation and understanding of ‘region’.

First, with regard to the actors, it should be noted that, in the general debate, interregionalism is often defined as cooperation between two specified regions composed of states within an interregional framework or a formal relationship. As a result interregionalism is often considered to be mainly a states–led or intergovernmental process. In the authors’ view, states are certainly important and often also crucial actors of interregionalism, but interregionalism is not intergovernmental by definition. On the contrary, various types of non–state actors from the private sector and civil society (i.e., transnational actors) are often, one way or the other, involved in the process. Their engagement is sometimes referred to as “transregionalism”.6 We consider these non–state processes to be part of interregionalism in the general sense. In addition, due to the fact that states and non–state actors are often grouped in complex multi–actor networks and coalitions, it is not always fruitful to understand them as two isolated and separate spheres of actors.

The second aspect, how to delimit and analyse regions, is more complex. Aggarwal and Fogarty (in this collection) use the label “pure interregionalism” to signify when the EU has relations only with one distinct and formally organised counterpart region, for instance a free trade area or customs union, as exemplified by the EU’s interregional free trade area with Mercosur. There are many instances when ‘regions’ are less ‘coherent’ and dispersed, but when the concept of interregionalism still makes sense. Under such circumstances it is fruitful to think in terms of types or degrees of interregionalism. Referring specifically to commercial relations, Aggarwal and Fogarty take the Lomé Convention as an example in which the EU has trade relations with a set of countries from other regions that are not grouped in their own customs union or free trade agreement. They refer to this as “hybrid interregionalism”.7 In its relationships with the ACP countries within the Cotonou Agreement the EU is trying to establish the much talked about Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with geographically more focused sub–regional organisations of Africa, such as SADC. To the extent that the EPAs are being implemented, they represent a deepening from hybrid to pure interregionalism.

The much–discussed APEC (Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation) involves at least two regions but the individual states negotiate bilaterally and not as regions. Due to its special characteristics, APEC is sometimes referred to as ‘transregionalism’, that is, a somewhat less coherent (i.e., diffuse) type of interregionalism. However, the bilateral negotiations within transregional arrangements should not draw attention away from the fact that these are taking place within a broader interregional framework. Nevertheless, as several studies in this collection will analyse, there is an intriguing relationship between bilateralism and interregionalism. Whereas bilateralism may be compatible with, or reinforce, interregionalism, at times the two processes may also compete.

Bilateralism can also be a means for regions (especially the EU) to be seen as particularly strong, and hence as an actor. If the EU is perceived as a partner
in a bilateral relationship, it is, by definition, seen as an ‘actor’. In this sense there is an overlap between bilateralism and interregionalism, since a bilateral relationship between two regions (as actors) leads to interregionalism. But it is still fruitful to problematise and focus on bilateralism as such.

In this context, it is particularly important to acknowledge that the EU can act as one collective regional actor in a bilateral relationship or, perhaps even more importantly, be seen as ‘one’ by outsiders, for instance, when signing a cooperation agreement or when disbursing aid. Therefore, the EU is the half of the ‘bilateral’ relationship with another actor (which may be a state or a region or multilateral institution). Obviously, there are many issues to explore regarding actorness, for instance how unified the policy-making process is within the EU, but this does not necessarily detract from the ‘actorness’ of the EU. There can be similar disagreements within states about policy processes, but even if states are not unified we do not dismiss them as actors. Being a regional organisation or a ‘region’ does not equate to being an actor: some actor qualities must be evident. Actorness can be defined as the capacity of regions and regional organisations “to develop presence, to become identifiable, aggregate interests, formulate goals and policies, make and implement decisions” (Rüland 2002, 6).

There is a final aspect to the way regions are considered and analysed, which impacts on how interregionalism is understood and defined. Frequently, especially in realist and liberal thinking, regions are taken as pre-given, defined in advance of research, and often seen as particular inter-state or policy-driven frameworks. Integral to this reasoning is the idea that regions are believed to exist ‘out there’, identifiable through material structures, regional organisations and rational regional actors (most often ‘states’). This is a pragmatic analytical strategy, which makes the study of interregionalism rather easy. However, at least in the authors’ opinion, it is equally relevant to see regions as social constructions. From this point of view, the puzzle is to explain the process through which regions are in the process of ‘becoming’ and are constructed/reconstructed by reflective actors, whereas the conventional emphasis is on a particular set of activities and flows within a pre-given regional framework. The constructivist approach necessarily results in a more open-ended interpretation of interregionalism. It implies, for instance, that, even if there is no formal regional organisation or grouping to relate to, it can still be fruitful to refer to a ‘region’ and, in consequence, one can also speak of interregionalism in this way.

5. Structure of the Collection

This collection contains five case studies that cover different aspects of the EU’s foreign policies, external relations and development cooperation. The first one deals with the EU’s interregional policy towards Africa. Mary Farrell argues that, the EU’s partnership strategy and the Cotonou agreement reflect neoliberal goals and the extension of economic liberalisation in the self-interests of the EU, rather than the normative agenda so often stated in the official discourse. The so-called ‘partnership’ with Africa is extremely asymmetric
and also risks splitting and fragmenting the ACP group, thereby limiting these countries’ negotiating strength towards the EU as well as within the WTO. As with the EU’s economic agenda, Farrell is sceptical concerning the underlying aim of the political dialogue pursued by the EU and the proclaimed concern for human rights, democracy promotion, and the rule of law. These issues are so closely linked to the economic liberalisation dimension as to suggest that their inclusion supports the objectives of economic liberalisation rather than any fundamental support for democratisation. According to Farrell, Africa is useful for its markets, natural resources and minerals, and the EU’s interregionalism is not driven by the ideal and norm–laden values so often emphasised by political leaders and policy–makers.

In the second case study, Sebastian Santander deals with the EU’s most important “strategic partnership” in Latin America, namely with the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). Santander explains that this partnership is based on political dialogue, cooperation and trade. He argues that the interregional partnership is inter alia designed in order to enhance the EU’s own legitimacy and its role as a global actor. But it should also be understood as an element in the EU’s strategy in the economic competition between Europe and the USA for the Southern Cone and the Americas as a whole. In fact, the ‘partnership’ between the EU and Mercosur is being pushed as a counterweight to the American strategic goals to create a hemispheric market through the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005, in which Mercosur will participate. Here, it is of particular interest to note that, whereas the EU provides support for institution–building and region–building in Mercosur, the US has frequently tried to destabilise and undermine the Mercosur framework.

Julie Gilson deals with a third case study involving the EU and East Asia. She focuses particularly on the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the EU–ASEAN dialogue. Gilson’s study examines and demonstrates how the EU utilises interregionalism as one mechanism for managing economic and political relations with a growing yet disparate region. Gilson addresses, in particular, issues about the formation of identity, the enduring discourse of the Cold War and the (Western) norms embedded in ASEM’s institutional structures. It is also shown that ASEM represents an important space for the articulation of non–state actors.

Vinod Aggarwal and Edward Fogarty show, in the fourth case study, that the EU has developed a series of bilateral relationships with Canada, Mexico and the United States rather than genuine region–to–region links. In this sense, the analysis reveals the limits and obstacles to interregionalism in the EU’s foreign policy. Aggarwal and Fogarty suggest that economic security competition appears to be the strongest factor mitigating against the formalisation of the EU–North American link. This is most interesting as the same factor is important in explaining the EU’s interregional ‘partnerships’ with many other regions around the world. In addition, the authors argue that the extreme economic and political asymmetry among NAFTA members, and the American dislike of trade agreements, are the obstacles towards the development of interregionalism between the EU and North America.
In the last case study, Karen Smith argues that the EU’s relations with Central and Eastern Europe are not an example of ‘interregionalism’, or bloc-to-bloc relations. The enlargement of the EU has been the dominating issue in this relationship and this has, in turn, inhibited the development of ‘sub-regionalism’ in Central and Eastern Europe as well as interregionalism. Smith analyses why this is the case, emphasising the tensions between ‘bilateralism’ and regionalism in the EU’s relations with Central and Eastern Europe. More specifically, she stresses that the absence of interregionalism is due not just to resistance by the Central and Eastern European states, but also to the EU’s incremental responses to the primarily political and security dilemmas posed by including/excluding countries from the EU. Smith shows that this has affected not only relations with the new member states, but continues to overshadow the EU’s relations with other European states.

The concluding analysis, written jointly by the editors and Patrik Stålgren, draws heavily on the five previous case studies in order to provide a comparative assessment of the EU as a global actor, and to account for the variation in the policy of interregionalism across regions and sectors. It provides three partly overlapping and intersecting (empirically based) explanations of the EU’s foreign policies: (i) promoting the liberal internationalist agenda; (ii) promoting the EU’s identity as a global actor around the world; and (iii) promoting the EU’s power and competitiveness. The authors conclude by discussing some elements of an emerging agenda for research on the EU’s foreign policy and interregionalism.

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Notes

3. This section draws on Hettne & Söderbaum (1999), pp. 359–360.
4. Others perceive three distinct periods of regionalism, also including the period existing between the two world wars, see Telò (2001).
5. RTA: Regional Trading Arrangement; GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; WTO: World Trade Organisation.
6. “Transregionalism as a concept can encompass a broader set of actor relationships than simply those among states. Any connection across regions — including transnational networks of corporate production or of nongovernmental organisations — that involves cooperation among any type of actors across two or more regions can in theory also be referred to as a type of transregionalism”, Aggarwal & Fogarty (2004), p. 5.
7. Hänggi (2000), p. 7, has a different understanding of hybrid relationships, which “may come close to interregional relations in those cases where the single power has a dominant position in its own region (e.g., the United States in North America; India in South Asia). Furthermore, relations between regional groupings and single powers may constitute an important component of biregional
or transregional arrangements (e.g., EU–China/EU–Japan and ASEM). The EU and ASEAN are the only regional groupings, which have a tradition of external relations with single powers.”

8. Thanks to Karen Smith for emphasising this point.
9. Also see Bretherton & Vogler (1999).

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Appendix: Membership of Sub-regional Groupings in Europe

Visegrad group: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia

Central European Free Trade Agreement (through 2004): Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

Council of Baltic Sea States: Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden

Barents Euro-Arctic Council: Denmark, European Commission, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden

Black Sea Economic Cooperation: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine

Central European Initiative: Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine
6 6. The EU as a Global Actor and the Dynamics of Interregionalism: a Comparative Analysis


