Civilization and culture as determinants of regional processes in ASEAN and European Union

1. Introduction

Globalization and regionalization processes intertwine in all the areas of modern international relations, prompting researchers not only to seek for reasons, magnitude and force of this reciprocal interaction, but also to look for the underlying explanation for such broad extent of determinants for shaping regional processes in various parts of the world.

Examination of regionalism trends is largely dependent on four fundamental factors of immediate influence upon the process under study, namely historical-political, economic, cultural-civilizational and *stricte* sociological aspects of the process.

This paper addresses cultural and civilizational determinants that shape the present regional processes in South East Asia and Europe.

2. Globalization vs. regionalization in international relations

The evolution of modern international scene is characterized by two dominant phenomena: the dynamic globalization of economic sphere on the one hand, and increase of regionalist trends on the other hand. Despite sharing a largely similar set of motives, both processes differ significantly in terms of the underlying principles. Hence, it must be noted here that globalization processes are predominantly conveyed by transnational corporations in their strife for profit maximization. In contrast to the above, the principal carriers of the process of intensification of regional cooperation are the individual countries. The latter can be attributed to the qualitative change in position of countries, effected by the ongoing evolution of international order.

It may also be useful to emphasize the complementary character of the two processes which, in the international environment devoid of dominant national powers, facilitate the realization of national interests of individual countries. It seems that the regional system is the proper environment for globalization to thrive and prosper, since it focuses on nation states as actors of a regional plane, co-deciding on the shape of specific policies on a number of issues, such as foreign direct investment or principles of legal order on the relevant territory. At the same time, regional structures insistently limit the role of nation states, by supplanting their exclusive rights for knowledge,
military power or control over migratory patterns. Lastly, it is the regional plane that seems best equipped to deal with new transnational problems, such as poverty and hunger, minimization of ethnic conflicts, environmental pollution, terrorism and other global issues. This is effected through creation of a system of institutions, agencies and authorities, with precisely defined areas of competence that warrant relatively prompt and efficient intervention.

The crash of the former bipolar system resulted in a new set of determinants that shape the policies of individual groups of countries. On the one hand, countries of the Western sphere of influence were made aware of the large cultural diversification of countries outside that sphere; on the other hand, the change brought about a steady increase of policies based on anxieties and fears for losing social cohesion and well-being. Furthermore, the process resulted in increased awareness of large diversity of value systems in different parts of the world, particularly in the political spheres. The need for international cooperation in such areas as protection of natural environment and employee rights is proof to the notion that such awareness is more apparent. At the same time, however, even minor attempts at regulation of standards in those areas raise negative reactions among societies, since regulation *ex definitione* presupposes a form of intervention, which is perceived as contradicting the very idea of globalization process. This seems to be one of the reasons for building regional systems of cooperation between countries on similar stage of economic development, social structure and cultural values. It is also one of the direct causes of regionalization in economic sphere as well as formation of regional trade groupings which, in the view of many researchers, form a strong challenge to the multilateral system of international trade. Regionalism, both among mature and emerging economies, may be viewed as response to the diminishing role of nation states as well as a way to address problems that cannot, by nature, be faced and eliminated by individual states – in particular, those that have no prospect of being solved on a global scale.

It must be noted that the present increase of regionalisms and groupings represents, historically speaking, a third large wave of regionalist trends, with the former waves observed in the 1930ies and 1960ies. Whereas the first wave was dictated by the need to protect national economies against the multilateral trends, the present

---

wave is characterized by active participation in the process of economic liberalization\(^2\). Of particular importance in the policies of emerging economies is not so much the need to ‘catch up’ with the leading economic powers, but the strive to strengthen both vertical and horizontal networks of cooperation with mature economies.

Hence, it may be assumed that regionalism is a phenomenon complementary to the process of globalization, and predominantly focused on minimization of cost incurred by global-scale problems. However, regionalism is not a universal process, and surely not fully predictable and well-recognized. Moreover, it may take on different forms, depending on the region. Thus, further advance of globalization is largely determined by particular forms of regional cooperation in individual groups of countries. In this context, it may be useful to analyze the principles of forming and functioning of free and preferential trade zones, since the fundamental assumptions of FTAs/PTAs involve the belief that regional groupings are the best viable approach that contributes to global prosperity, in the absence of full liberalization of trade on global scale. However, as emphasized by Krugman in his publication *The Move Toward Free Trade Zones*\(^3\) as early as 1991, this process involves a certain risk that, in the light of article 24 GATT/WTO, is considered a violation of international law, namely – selective liberalization, characterized by protectionist and discriminative tendencies. At the same time, Krugman admits that integration is a natural element of modern economy, resulting not only in sizeable increase of trade volume between neighboring countries, but also boosting competitive advantage and diversification in the sphere of production, compared with countries outside the grouping. As such, it should not come at the cost of discrimination nor protectionist behavior.

Thus, regions play a key role in the modern world, both as an element of the ongoing process of world trade liberalization, and as an instrument for realization of particularistic interests of individual nation states.

---


3. Civilizational and cultural setting of regional processes in ASEAN and European Union groupings

The scale of economic correlation within the ASEAN grouping is markedly lower than that of a model level required for initiation of political cooperation. In contrast, augmentation of political cooperation within EU is an exceptionally dynamic process, coupled with relatively advanced structure of social cooperation. Both groupings, however, share the similar strife for self-identity on the global arena; thus, emphasizing not only those qualities that define their dissimilarity from others, but also – or, in fact, most of all – those attributes that constitute cultural proximity of the nation states within the integration group. For many years now, both in professional literature and journalism on international affairs, authors have used the term of “Asian (versus) European Way”\(^4\). However, analytical examination of the process under study requires a certain perspective, based on the theory of constructivism in international relations. The underlying reason is that classical schools, such as realistic and liberal/neoliberal, do not seem to address the issue of cultural factors as determinants of inter-governmental processes. As observed by Kanishka Jayasuriya, “regionalism is a social debate which, through construction of common metaphors, analogies and concepts, determines the interpretation of not only a region as such, but also of individual countries that constitute the region in question”\(^5\). It is those categories that decide on success of regional process and, most of all, define its shape.

The above discussion leads to an important question: what is the character of each political culture and how does it influence the development of relevant processes? That is, what are the properties of “European” versus “Asian Way”? It is impossible to formulate unambiguous responses to such questions. An analysis of each problem connected with these categories should begin with indicating their dissimilar backgrounds. Baogang He pointed out in his paper that: *The normative foundation of the European Union is democracy, human rights, personal freedom and gradual reduction of national sovereignty for the sake of regional organization which is capable of overruling particular interests of governments. A normative foundation of Asian regionalism is the (nationalist?) national doctrine, weight of statistics in the*


decision-taking process, and the Asian culture of values\textsuperscript{6}. On the other hand, Felker observes that “ASEAN, in principle, was founded on utility and common sense, but further cooperation on regional scale should be based on regional community of values and ideals\textsuperscript{7}”.

The analysis of unity of Asian values, postulated by Baogang He, seems very apt and suitable in this context, and as such will be used for the purpose of contrasting the European and Asian perception of self-identity.

For the sake of further elaboration of the subject under study, it may be practical to define the term ‘identity’, as used in the context of international relations. Professional literature provides several divergent approaches to the term. The idea of ‘identity’ on international arena is rooted in several other scientific fields, notably: sociology, anthropology and – most of all - philosophy. It is defined as a set of qualities that discern a group (in this case, a regional grouping) from other units of social structure. At the same time, the above set of qualities should be relatively stable in time\textsuperscript{8}. Wendt puts the emphasis on the notion that regional self-identity – or rather the process of defining this type of identity – is still based on the idea of self-identity of individual nation states which, through cultural identification with neighboring states, look for common values in history, arts, literature and – eventually – hierarchical constructs of societies and principles governing public life\textsuperscript{9}. Such self-identity not only provides the societies with sense of unity within regional groupings, but – more importantly – with the sense of security and mutual understanding among partners in international relations. To sum up, regional self-identity remains a function of individual identities of individual members of the grouping, and – as such – should not invalidate nor play down the role of individual identities. Put in this way, the above definition allows the researcher to examine roles of individual members in the process of regional integration and provides better understanding of the notion under study.

Analysis of historical approaches to the problem at hand shows certain degree of convergence in the evolution of self-identity within both groupings under study. After

all, the popular idea of Pan-Europe, as postulated by R. Coudenhove-Kalergi ("the United States of Europe") corresponds directly to the idea of Pan-Asia, as voiced by Sun Yatsen (Sun Zhongshan) and Oder Kenkichi, both of which are rarely quoted in professional analyses. One problematic issue in this context – pertinent also in the 21st century – is the need for clear delineation between the notions of regionalism and nationalism. In the early years of the 20th century, national interests clearly dominated the decision-making processes. Consequently, those early efforts at integration were doomed to fail. At the same time, it might be useful to note that the panEuropean movement was aimed at reinforcing state governments through postulated cooperation. In contrast, the pan-Asian movement was, from the onset, anti-Western in character and decidedly related to similar movements in other parts of the world at that time. Hence, it may be useful to address the question in the modern context. Thus, are the contemporary ideas of cultural self-identity in Asia and Europe defensive and reactive in their character? Should they be perceived merely as a response to progressing globalization of international relations? The obvious answer is no, not at all. However, scientific analysis of this notion requires careful examination of the concepts involved.

Another easily discernible feature of the conceptual search for self-identity in Asia and Europe is the intensification of integration projects and discussions within both ASEAN and EU in the early 1990s. The process came as a result of determined reaction to the US notion of American domination (also on cultural level!) in the modern geopolitics, and ‘proliferation’ of the concept of “the world more American than ever before”.

The idea of cultural integrity in Europe is a well-documented and well-researched concept. Professional literature typically emphasizes the role of Christian religious tradition that not only united the continent over the ages, but also strongly influenced the character of international relations. The above view is undisputable and, most of all, well-founded. The cultural substance built on the fundaments of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations is not only characterized by easily recognizable concepts of law and social order, but also provides answers to numerous problems raised at disputes over international relations in this part of the world. In addition, J. Burgess

and E. Harris\textsuperscript{13} emphasize that the present level of cultural integrity of European nations stems, most of all, from remarkable migration and mobility patterns observed in this region throughout history. This observation seems of great importance in the context of modern workforce mobility programs stimulated within the EU community. Moreover, this feature remains in strong contrast with the patterns observed in South East Asia region.

Early years of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century mark the emergence of a new quality in the disputes over regional identity, both in Europe and Asia. This new element clearly defines the shape of modern perception of identity. This concept, expressed in the phrase “unity in diversity”\textsuperscript{14}, calls for respect of differences between cultures of individual nations, while retaining and emphasizing the need for negotiated agreements on governmental level. Moreover, the strength of regional groupings is believed to be the result of the above diversity.

Analyzing the institutional development of European Union, many researchers accentuate the need for building regional identity not only as an instrument of differentiation from other actors of the global political scene, but, more importantly, as a fundament of the integration processes within the grouping\textsuperscript{15}. Modern debates on this concept emphasize the concept of building common interest areas to override particularistic interests of individual governments, supporting liberties and social solidarity based on rich European tradition of social order, democracy and human rights as fundamentals of international order. Proponents of this idea maintain that European identity should be viewed not only as fundament of the EU position on global scene, but also a way to legitimize the power of regional institutions. Only then full compliance and accord of individual nations/governments can be achieved for decisions made on supranational level within all three pillars of EU organization\textsuperscript{16}. At the same time, as emphasized by M. Schneider\textsuperscript{17}, the fundamental construct of European identity is expressed in the need for balanced relations between two fundamental platforms of cultural identification, namely: national (nationalist) and regional. In addition, this

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{13} E. Harris, New Forms of Identity in Contemporary Europe, Perspectives on European Politics and Society, European Journal of Social Theory, No. 4(1), 2003, pp. 13-33
\bibitem{14} F. Pichler, Affection to and Exploitation of Europe. European Identity in the EU, Institute von Höhere Studien, Wien 2005
\bibitem{15} M. Kohle, Die Einstellung einer Europäischen Identität: Konflikte und Potentiale, (in:) H. Kaelble, M. Kirsch, Transnationale Öffentlichkeit und Identität in 20ten Jahrhundert, Main, Frankfurt am Main 2002, p. 133.
\bibitem{16} R. Sinnott Integration Theory, Subsidiarity and the Internationalization of Issues: The Implication for Legitimacy, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004
\bibitem{17} M. Schneider, Wir Europäer, “Jungle World” 31/2004
\end{thebibliography}
process is time-consuming and should be focused on providing certain mechanisms for future use, as opposed to the present EU trend of concentrating on particularistic problems at hand. Crisis over participation of national armed forces in the Iraq offensive or the turbulent disputes over European Constitution are good examples of the above trend. Thus, while declaration of war is of crucial significance for individual governments and may contravene fundamental values of the nation, such as national safety and survival, problems raised during constitutional disputes seem to question the maturity of individual societies. To corroborate the above thesis, one may quote results of survey studies conducted by Eurobarometer in July, 2004\textsuperscript{18}. While strong 79% of the respondent base supported the need for adopting the Constitutional Treaty as a warranty of future development of EU, only 62% of those supporters identified themselves as Europeans.

The last but, nonetheless, fundamental issue worth mentioning here is the institution of European citizenship. Article 9 of the consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union holds that “Every national of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Citizenship of the Union shall be additional to and not replace national citizenship”\textsuperscript{19}. Thus, it is apparent that the institution of Union citizenship is of supplementary character and is fully supportive of the principle of national citizenship. Another equally important issue is the institution of direct universal suffrage in respect to members of the European Parliament (art.14, pt.3, of the consolidated TEU), which fully supports the postulate of direct participation of citizens in decision-making processes within EU community and, as such, is a tangible manifestation of the implementation of the European identity concept.

The construct of European identity is thus perceived in historical, cultural, political and institutional perspective. Consequently, this comprehensive approach should also be adopted for the purpose of analysis. The above, largely generalized outline – for the sake of brevity – is used here only to emphasize fundamental differences between “European” vs. “Asian Way”, with the latter examined in detail in the next section of this paper.

The “Asian Way” concept is relatively new; first adopted in political disputes in the early 1990s. However, it seems that associating the concept with the idea of pan-Asia is a highly questionable approach. For the purpose of clarification of this category,

\footnote{Survey results: www.europa.eu.int/comm/public_opnion/flash/fl159_2en.pdf}
let us start with analyzing the former concept, regardless of the chronological order. Many researchers accentuate its role in the process of strengthening international cooperation within the ASEAN framework. A good exemplification of this approach can be found in the text of Bali Concord II of October, 2003: “ASEAN shall continue to foster a community of caring societies and promote a common regional identity”. The document contains several other references to cultural diversity of individual nations. This, in combination with assorted political declarations of ‘unity in diversity’, provides a clear picture of the present evolution of this concept. It should be noted that the Bali Concord formulates a framework for dynamic cultural and scientific exchange between member states and emphasizes the need to foster broader regional identity. However, it is difficult to assess the present shape of regional identity, due to lack of reliable sociological research in this respect.

In his analysis of the evolution of this concept, Wang Zheng Yi\(^{20}\) points out to three fundamental problems that have defined the phenomenon since the end of Cold War era:

1. the Flying Geese paradigm and the Greater China theory;
2. balance of powers vs. concert of the powers;
3. the “ASEAN Way”.

The first of the above elements directly relates to the question of leadership in the region. The ‘Flying Geese’ paradigm refers to the role of Japan in South East Asia, while Greater China theory is meant to redefine the role of China in the new international order. Yong Deng\(^{21}\) goes as far as to maintain that the balance of powers in the region strongly coincides with that of Europe, with roles of Germany and France reflected here by Japan and China, respectively. In this context, determination of the ASEAN countries in their strife for defining the concept of regional identity is quite understandable.

According to the ‘Flying Geese’ paradigm, international system of East Asia region is based on the leader-follower scheme, with strong primacy of Japan, followed by subsequent ‘waves’ of newly industrialized economies (NIEs), namely: South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, then ASEAN-4 (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand) and China. Some researchers also quote the example of Vietnam as a


\(^{20}\) Wang Zheng Yi, op. cit., p. 232
representative of the next industrialization wave in the region. As such, this particular concept relates to the East Asia region as a whole. However, from the viewpoint of this elaboration, it may be useful to emphasize the concept not only as a fundamental premise for building regional identity, but also – through its military and political implications – as an important factor in the process of building trust in the region. Following the exceptionally dynamic growth initiated in the 1980s, as well as regaining control over Hong Kong (1997) and Macau (1999) and WTO accession in 2001, China regained its former role of regional power and can clearly be perceived as the principal contender to the title of regional leader. As Cohen puts it: “Analysis of four thousand years of political history in Asia does not show any distinct pointers suggesting continuation of past phenomena, with the notable exception of China in their fight for regaining the role of regional policy-maker”\textsuperscript{22}. The above thesis should be supplemented by sinocentric perception of international relations, based strongly on Confucian system. This, in turn, directs the research to the concept of Chinese cultural influence in the region – after all, major parts of South East Asia are under such influence, since Confucian system is the driving force of Asian regional development as well as one of the most potent determinants of political culture in the region.

The next element of Wang Zheng Yi’s analysis is an attempt at interpreting cultural fundamentals of security structure in the region. Historical evaluation of social and political thought of the region’s nations shows exceptionally defensive, even pacifistic character of their attitudes. It may seem that war has no part in the system of values, based on fundamentals of harmony, balance and peace as qualities strongly rooted in Confucian and Buddhist systems. From this perspective, it seems natural to seek a system of international relations that would provide effective security in the region. It must be noted that the concept of power balance has dominated the political thought in the region ever since the end of Cold War era. In the 1950s and 1970s, strong antagonism between the US and the Soviet Union resulted in clear polarization of nation states in the South East Asia, with Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore on one side of the curtain, and countries of the Indochina Peninsula (Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia) on the other. In 1990s, due to qualitative changes on global political and economic scene, a new concept came into being: the concert of powers; playing an important role in the modern regional cooperation. This

concept comprises three fundamental principles that regulate international relations: regional crises are to be solved through permanent consultation between the region’s powers; stability of the system is guarded by broad cooperation between nation states; and the system is based on the principle of absolute equality of the members, with non-intervention principle in full force.

The above elements help address the question posed earlier on in this elaboration, namely: how to interpret the notion of “Asian Way”. The roots of this concept can be traced back to 1960s. ASA (The Association of Southeast Asia), formed in 1961, was the first attempt at cooperation within South East Asia region. The organization consisted of only three member states and lasted but two years, due to border disputes between Malaysia and Philippines. The Maphilindo of 1963 was another take on integration in the region, and similarly unsuccessful, since conflicts over national interests of member states were still unresolved at that time. The breaking point came with the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, marking the onset of creative debate over the structure of regional identity idea. In contrast with the culture of European Union, based on formation of legal principles and policies, ASEAN as an international organization adopted a completely different approach: based on openness and flexibility of the decision-making processes.

The ASEAN decision-making processes are characterized by two fundamental principles: consultation and consensus. Politicians of the region often invoke the example of mechanisms adopted in democratic regulations of Malaysian communities, but this particular view is widely disputed in professional literature. Consensus is, undoubtedly, one of the fundaments of organizations devoid of such institutions as voting and veto rights. Secondly, the principle of flexibility is manifested in determined aversion towards any institutionalization attempts. Decisions are made in the course of broad negotiations, oftentimes informal, but nonetheless binding for governments involved in the process of hammering out a common position in particular issues. Thirdly, there is a common belief that all decisions made within ASEAN, both regional and national in scope, are strictly political. Wang Zheng Yi emphasizes that this structural framework of regional cooperation, supplemented by the notion of cultural integrity, common historical experiences, unified model of development and other factors, constitute the force and success of this concept. It is worth noting here that

---

cooperation within ASEAN is relatively smooth and capable of fast resolution of regional conflicts. Moreover, as a mechanism of cooperation, it proves to be exceptionally effective and practical, characterized by remarkably short decision-making processes. These qualities place the ASEAN model in distinct contrast to the European model of bureaucracy, with its widely voiced decision-making crisis. Such, in essence, are the condensed, fundamental differences between the ‘old’ (European) and the ‘new’ (open Asian) model of regional cooperation.

4. Conclusions

Widely dissimilar character of premises and factors directly influencing regional processes in Europe and South East Asia determines the large disparity of the two groupings under study. Cultural and civilizational elements presented herein shape international relations in the respective regions and define the roles of those organizations on the global political and economic scene. Due to their distinct characteristics, those structures cannot be analyzed using any of the traditional theoretical schools of international relations, since neither provides instruments for adequate evaluation of the processes under study. It seems that the most valid approach is to study them from the viewpoint of social constructivism theory, supplemented by elements of neoliberalism (economic relations in international organizations) and political realism (construction of mutual trust areas, national security, decision-making).

23 Azja-Pacyfik. Obraz gospodarczy regionu, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej we Wrocławiu,
Regionalization processes observed in Europe and Southeast Asia are subject to numerous analyses and political disputes on both continents. Their roots and effects are studied by sociologists, economists and politicians, arising debates and controversies. In the light of the above, determinants of the process are analyzed, as shaped by civilization and culture of the regions involved, together with their specificity and impact on the forms of integration groupings of EU and ASEAN.