

CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY REGIONALISM:
THE EU BETWEEN REGIONAL
AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE. A REVIEW ESSAY

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ABSTRACT

The present review essay presents ten recently published books on regionalism, integration and global governance. The discussion focuses on the state of European integration post-crisis and on the EU's external projection and possible role in a multi-polar global order. Drawing mainly on recent works by Mario Telò, a pioneer in the integration of International Relations and European Area studies, the article addresses integration from a comparative regionalist perspective. Several theoretical and normative insights taken from the regionalist debate are applied to specific dilemmas of EU integration in a multi-polar "world of regions". The interplay between external trade and security policy is analysed by considering European relations with China, Russia and the WTO. Recent empirical accounts of the Ukrainian crisis help in assessing the feasibility of regional governance in Europe and its contribution to global stability. The study concludes that the EU is well positioned to overcome tensions between its region-building efforts and the emergence of a post-hegemonic global governance framework. To succeed, however, the Union must pragmatically revise its current mix of integration and cooperation, with a view to acquiring the strategic capabilities needed to guarantee security within its area of influence.

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INTRODUCTION

Ten years after the global crisis, the EU can claim a qualified success. It prevented the collapse of the Euro, averted Grexit, withstood the shock

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of Brexit – a lamentable but nonetheless democratic decision – and even moved (small) steps forward towards greater internal and global integration. All this was achieved while confronting Russia in a dense negotiation over the fate of Ukraine and while coping with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis all around the Mediterranean's shores. The new challenges, however, brought Europe to a new identity crisis.

In the post-crisis world, after a decade of internal tensions and transformations, the 'EU28-minus-1' has seen most of its certainties crumble. The integration process has become politicised, and not in the (expected) direction of strengthening its democracy and legitimacy. The political equilibria of the continent have been unsettled by growing asymmetries, not only between the Continental core and its peripheries, but within the core itself, due to the alleged return of a German question in Europe. Its neighbourhood has been torn apart, by the Arab Spring and its complicated legacies, by the war in Syria, and by the rise of the Islamic State and the associated terrorist threat. Relations with the US, Russia and China have become denser, but increasingly complicated by – once unthinkable – security concerns.

What is the possible role of the EU in the new scenario? Can the EU cope and adapt, while upholding its values and model of integration? Recent scholarship has framed these or similar questions in terms of a tension between regional integration and the emergence of a multipolar global order. This review essay presents ten books furnishing innovative insights for the analysis and theorisation of the EU's current challenges and potential role within the international system.

The text is structured as follows. Section 1 specifies the key challenges now facing EU integration with the help of recent works by Mario Telò, a leading figure in the study of comparative regionalism and global governance. Section 2 broadens the discussion by considering other theoretical perspectives and their analytical and normative insights. Section 3 focuses on some specific dilemmas of EU integration in a multilateral world, while Section 4 delves more deeply into the geo-strategic turmoil unleashed by Russia's new activism in Eastern Europe. The final section draws lessons from the very many indications offered by the books reviewed.

1. REGIONALISM IN A MULTILATERAL WORLD: CHALLENGES FOR THE EU

At the turn of century, the Asian crisis of 1997-98 and the 9/11 terror strikes cast serious doubts on the viability of ungoverned economic globalization. Many analysts agreed that a post-hegemonic system was replacing post-Cold War unipolarism. The USA was no longer able or willing to supply key public goods, such as international security and economic stabil-

ity, reorienting international relations towards 'realism' and reinstating the 'Westphalian' state model. Such an intergovernmental turn would displace transnational processes of economic, cultural and societal integration, reinforcing governmental powers of boundary-drawing and control. The EU itself would be compelled to choose between becoming a fully-fledged federal entity or abandoning its regional ambitions. With hindsight, such expectations were too simplistic. There instead emerged a much more complex reality, whose driving logic is still hard to fathom: one where trade integration, regional polity-building and the return of 'high politics' favour a multi-polar reorganisation of the global order based on the intersection of transnational and multi-level networks of relations.

Mario Telò pioneered the study of these new modes of regional integration. A recent monograph (Telò 2016) systematises the last three decades of his research. This concise text musters a vast array of theoretical reasoning, empirical detail and analytical insights. Intellectual richness invites several re-readings but still does not impair the book's reader-friendliness. Telò develops a neat historico-institutionalist framework based on the concept of "longue durée" and critical juncture. He offers a periodisation of 'regionalism' as a global phenomenon since the interwar period. Regionalism evolved from an authoritarian and 'Westphalian' version to a more technocratic one in the decades of US hegemony. Thereafter, it became more bottom-up and multi-lateral after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but later it returned to being more politicised, competitive and geo-political in nature. Today, "competitive regionalism" fluctuates between neo-mercantilist temptations and hopes for enlightened global governance.

A comparative historical analysis ensues. It accounts for integration in the ASEAN, MERCOSUR, NAFTA and SADC areas, as well as in other (lesser) regional groupings, stressing the importance of diffusion, variation and interdependence in contemporary regionalism. Different drivers of integration (domestic, transnational and systemic) interact with the contextual specificities, cultural and economic, of each region, stimulating innovation through the formulation of different agendas and policy mixes. Against this backdrop, regional actors become involved in overlapping and often contradictory regional and interregional endeavours, trying to assert their geopolitical influence, to gain benefits from international trade, but also – sometimes – to solve truly global problems related to terrorism, migration and global warming. Over a century of regionalist experimentation has left institutional and cultural legacies, including lessons from past errors and elite socialisation, that prevent the outright comeback of Westphalian relations. The game of new regional and interregional rela-

tions comprises varying levels of stability and time consistency, depending on the congruence among external stimuli, geo-strategic trade-offs and the ambitions of governmental and non-governmental actors.

Elaborating on his narrative, Telò discusses regionalism's new political and territorial nature, its higher stakes, and its ambiguous impact on democratic legitimacy, trade integration and development. Against this backdrop, the EU features as a role-model and an advanced laboratory of integration, but also as an actor in search of purpose which may learn from other experiences. Characterised by internal asymmetries, limited internal redistribution and a larger role of national executive leaders, the EU faces the limits of Germany's regional leadership together with ubiquitous security challenges. Hence, while its distinctive integration model is losing attractiveness, the present-day EU also suffers from dilemmas well-known to the more troubled experiences of MERCOSUR and NAFTA. In this respect, Telò's analysis looks favourably upon differentiated integration – exemplified by the 'ASEAN-plus' concentric circles – as a possible way to overcome tensions among overlapping structures of regional governance.

In accordance with Telò's encompassing analysis, the main challenge for the EU today is to set for itself congruent priorities for internal reform and international projection. This entails recasting integration to overcome internal asymmetries and reacting adaptively to the ambiguities and inconsistencies of today's multilateralism. It is a scenario where regional hegemons and regional entities rival and often pre-empt each other, driven by competing neo-mercantilist and security concerns. But what is the EU's room for manoeuvre in the current post-hegemonic (and partly post-Western) global order?

2. THEORIES OF REGIONALISM: SOME ANALYTICAL AND NORMATIVE INSIGHTS

In recent years, other works edited by Mario Telò have dealt with the interplay between institutional dynamics at the regional and systemic level. *State, Globalization and Multilateralism* (Telò 2012) is a path-breaking but somewhat overlooked, endeavour. The book asks what new roles the state may assume in the present – post-9/11 and post-crisis – world. A set of nine dense chapters, enriched by Telò's insightful introductory and concluding remarks on multilateralism, multi-polarism and regionalism, deal with a broad range of topics. Predating some conclusions of his 2016 book, Telò looks at the long-term evolution of both regionalism and multilateralism. He shows that the EU is a successful experiment in the incremental insti-

tutionalisation of “diffuse” – as opposed to “specific” – reciprocity within a ‘club’ of states with partly conflicting aspirations. The EU falls short of being a replicable template for integration as well as a global leader for a multilateral order. Nonetheless, it embodies the possibility to reconcile regionalism and multilateralism in a polity-building endeavour.

Chen Zhimin’s chapter on China’s notion of foreign policy responsibility draws an insightful parallelism between Chinese and European attempts to instrumentalise multilateralism and advance their respective socio-cultural specificities and development ambitions. Other chapters address the key question of (democratic) legitimacy in a post-Westphalian system. Thomas Meyer elaborates on the prospects for national democracy under the new, regulatory, form of statehood fostered by globalisation. Internal and external challenges to traditional stateness, he suggests, leave global democracy as the only way to ensure effective and legitimate governing at every level of the international order. Normative scholarship on the issue demonstrates how hard it is to transcend the recasting of state-like practices, tasks and institutions. Therefore, Meyer concludes, global democracy requires stateness to be reorganised and redistributed across the national, regional and global levels. Andreas Vasilache supplements the above arguments with his focus on the increasingly gubernatorial nature of global governance, which poses a further internal challenge to national democracy. National governments candidly acknowledge the international nature of most contemporary policy problems, but much less easily upload their prerogatives to the regional or global level. Conversely, they end up by blurring the distinction between regulatory and foreign or security affairs, as well as that between government and non-public governance, ultimately reinforcing executive and administrative autonomy *vis-à-vis* legislative and judicial autonomy.

These neo-Westphalian transformations bring an existential challenge against the existing global order, calling into question its normative underpinnings and creating a strong rationale for democratising national foreign policy-making. Should the solution to new global problems be found, as Vasilache suggests, in the further expansion of national democracy? Or, alternatively, how should power and legitimacy be redistributed in a multi-polar and multi-level environment? In *Still a Western World?*, Sergio Fabbrini and Raffaele Marchetti (2017) address this question from the perspective of the changing power balance among the World’s largest regions.

Their edited book offers several perspectives on post-crisis global governance, outlining the challenges and dilemmas posed by the West’s diminished global stance. Some contributors elaborate on the lessened impact, on the strategies of the largest world powers, of mutual security threats. Less reciprocal fear has resulted in broader ambitions and more complex

foreign policy agendas, which command new modes of competition and cooperation and new reasons for solidarity among neighbouring countries. In addition, Mario Telò points out that the defining features of “new regionalism” – its multi-purpose, multi-level and multi-actor nature – elude realist, liberal and functionalist theories of cooperation. Regions are resilient actors in an interstate system which is still anarchic, but less violent and unruly than in the past, owing to their role in conflict management and prevention. An unprecedented level of institutional resilience characterises this heterogeneous “world of regions”, but the question remains as to whether institutionalisation can produce new forms of sovereignty capable of effective global governance. Marchetti is therefore right to shed light on the legitimating role of regional “global projects” – patterns of action and discourse activated by the leading global powers to advance their preferences, interests and values – and of the narratives that reconcile them with the national sovereignty, culture and tradition of their respective proponents.

Resonating with Marchetti’s perspective, the chapters in the second part of the book present the grand strategies of the US, China, the EU and Russia. Walter R. Mead traces Obama’s foreign policy back to the traditional ideational cleavages of US diplomacy: an analysis that, still today, sheds light on the diplomatic oddities of the Trump administration. Shaun Breslin and Silvia Menegazzi convincingly argue that China has come up with an original understanding of global and regional governance. The result is *à la carte* cooperation with the West and support – although not without criticism – for the current international order. Vittorio E. Parsi deals with the EU’s more disenchanted post-crisis foreign policy. A weakening economy and looming security threats, he contends, have made the Union more pragmatic and less ideological, watering down its commitment to a liberal international order. In his narrative, however, the impact of feebleness is hardly distinguishable, in strength and direction, from that of pragmatism. Richard Sakwa finally presents Russia as a dissatisfied world player which has become increasingly aggressive. Frustrated by the lack of international recognition of its self-perceived status as a ‘great power’, Russia has felt betrayed in its efforts to appease with the West and take credit for and ownership for its own post-communist transformation. At first, Russian elites tried to appropriate values of Western origin, such as democracy or national self-determination. More recently, however, they have displayed scepticism of those same liberal norms, increasing Russia’s level of threat towards its western neighbours. The failure to accommodate some of Russia’s symbolic aspirations soon after the fall of communism may now come at the cost of escalating confrontation.

Fabbrini’s concluding chapter looks at domestic politics in both the EU and the US, arguing that their dilemmas hinder the two powers’ ability

to respond to their most recent external challenges. Blending theories of international relations with foreign policy analysis, Fabbrini considers intergovernmentalism in EU foreign policy-making as dysfunctional as polarised politics and divided government in the US. Dys functionality arises in both systems as inability to move beyond fundamental conflicts of values and worldviews, producing chronic inter-institutional conflict and illegitimate decisions. The argument strengthens Mead's and Parsi's diagnoses, contributing two better specified politico-institutional mechanisms to their arguments. On the downside, the chapter fails to tackle all the promising loose ends left by the other contributions; moreover, it leaves the question in the book's title unanswered.

Still a Western World? leaves its readers with the strong impression that the West's loss of structural power and diplomatic influence is both fostered and compounded by an existential crisis of its most advanced models of polity and politics (US federalism and EU integration). If the legitimacy of the global order is trapped in a zero or negative sum game, the expansion of democratic opportunities at the national level – in the West or elsewhere – may not suffice as a remedy. Novel sorts of polity-building may be required across the national, regional and global levels. Two recent books on the nature and limits of regionalism – Søren Dosenrode (2015)'s *Limits to Regional Integration* and Fredrik Söderbaum (2015)'s *Rethinking Regionalism* – help in recognising their emergence.

Dosenrode's reflections are rooted in milestone theories of regionalism: neo-functionalism and federalism, in its realist and liberal variants. Accordingly, he distinguishes regionalisation and regional cooperation (limited in scope and consensus-based) from regional integration *tout court*, supranational and based on a transfer of national sovereignty. When does a group of states move from the former to the latter? What are the main or most typical obstacles that get in the way? The editor introduces no fewer than eleven case studies on regionalisation – cases ranging from low regionalisation to strong integration – before concluding that federalism and neo-functionalism jointly suggest that integration is never foreordained, as it may stop, reverse or break down. Realist federalism, concerned with rational choice and institutional instrumentalism, teaches that federations may not survive either failure or success in addressing the problem they were born to solve, but may also fail due to inability to guarantee – for example through the emergence of a multi-level party system – the legitimacy of both the union and the sub-union level. Neo-functionalism, in turn, focuses on both short-term interests and emotions/identities, interested as it is in the ability of supranational institution to stimulate a “transfer of loyalty” capable of justifying past and future “transfers of sovereignty”. Integration may equally well stop in the case of failure, success or overstretch, but the

creation of a federal identity and the adoption of fair functional and institutional solutions may keep its momentum alive.

Notwithstanding its scope, great substantive interest and historical detail and a clearly stated research design, only to some extent does the empirical core of the book assist its theory building ambitions. Most chapters, in fact, consist of analytical narratives that are satisfactory singularly taken, but lack a clear connection to the editor's theoretical interests. This hampers their contribution to an (explanatory) theory of the limits of integration. Conversely, the empirical richness of the case studies highlights the limited analytical scope of the theoretical chapters. The influence of geo-economic, geopolitical and socio-cultural preconditions – hardly reducible to the presence, absence or activation of a crisis – is not taken up by the editor. For instance, the empirical cases focus on the contradictions between overlapping integration projects as well as the influence of external actors and of competition among regional role-models: phenomena inadequately addressed by the book's theoretical framework.

Here Söderbaum's study nicely complements Dosenrode's, priming its reader in the old-new regionalist debate and indicating a new research agenda for "comparative regionalism". His approach is rooted in constructivism and focuses on the agency of regional actors, conceptualised in terms of "regionness" and "regional actorness". Contemporary regionalist studies, the author argues, fail to grasp the contested and multi-dimensional nature of regional integration, reducing it to its historical or territorial manifestations: a choice that prevents understanding of the underlying logic of regionalisation across the globe, as much as its relevance to global governance. Conversely, Söderbaum focuses on the interplay of ideas, values and interests. Regional actors, he argues, develop more complex internal and external ties as they grow from contiguous spaces to institutionalised polities. He expects regionness – that is, identity, cohesion and external assertiveness – to increase with regional institutionalisation. This sort of polity-building, however, is unlikely to reproduce the cohesive structure of the Westphalian nation-state, approximating instead the multi-cultural and decentralised configuration of pre-modern empires.

On these grounds, Söderbaum defends eclecticism and cultural sensitivity in comparing regional entities, seeking a balance between parochialism (e.g. Eurocentrism) and overreaching generalisations. Eclecticism thus makes it possible to acknowledge the intersection of diverse (and even contradictory) forms of regional institutionalisation that have been hastily associated with specific "ecologies". Thus, for instance, integration in Europe is not exclusively formal and democratic/pluralist; it also manifests features, such as informality and power asymmetry, which are considered defining characteristics of Asian or African regionalism. Focusing on the role of civil

society and, especially in the Third World, the interaction between domestic/civilian interests and foreign/external actors (including other regional blocks) not only sheds light on informal processes in supposedly highly formalised settings (such as the EU or the NAFTA) but also reveals unexpected instances of pluralism in unlikely settings such as Africa or the Arab world.

Understanding regionness as a composite rather than monolithic feature also sheds new light on interregional practices, uncovering their multiplicity and overlap. Trans-regionalism and bilateralism appear as important complements of more formalised and intergovernmental patterns of cooperation. They contribute not only to institutionalising new regional entities, but also to consolidating the identity of more established regions, favouring the adoption of distinctive modes and motives of external projection. Regions thus constitute complex spheres of authority that, with varying degrees of legitimacy or success, exercise control on international problems and public goods. Transcending purely nation-based or multilateral paradigms, they provide additional solutions to govern global dynamics. Regional governance is thus best understood as one among many tools of global governance, rather than as an intermediate step towards perfect multilateralism among nation states or a global scale upload of the same Westphalian model.

In sum, Söderbaum's original reading of the regionalist debate can be usefully related to Fabbrini and Marchetti's interest in the role of the West in global governance and to Dosenrode's quest for a theory of regionalism. The three books leave readers with multiple theoretical perspectives to choose from. A key lesson to draw, however, is that the global spread and hybridisation of regional integration challenge the dominance of Western models of polity-building and political legitimacy. The intellectual challenge of comparative regionalism is therefore to go beyond old models of global and regional integration, acknowledging both the weakened global stance of the West and the reduced influence of its paradigms of nation-building, regional integration and globalisation. Contrary to rushed conclusions about an impending global disorder, Söderbaum highlights the increased potential for regional policy-making and stabilisation possessed by a plurality of intersecting paradigms of integration. This line of reasoning acknowledges the problem of ensuring legitimacy but rejects a simplistic focus on the deficits of supranational government. Instead of advocating a grand solution for global multilateralism – and lamenting the lack thereof – a similar approach would emphasise the adaptive and transformative potential of more situated and contingent legitimation processes, within a deliberately “in progress” framework of multilevel governance.

As Telò's reflections above also suggest – in a constructive dialogue with a Rokkanian perspective on polity-building – the stratification of

multiple patterns of problem-solving and reciprocity-creation, exemplified once again by the “ASEAN+” experience, might be more conducive to legitimate global governance than overly ambitious transfers of sovereignty to new supranational ‘centres’. Is this a feasible route for the EU, or has European integration gone too far already?

3. THE EU BETWEEN REGION-BUILDING AND MULTILATERALISM

The comparative regionalist debate sees the EU facing a twofold challenge: that of relaunching its model of integration while embedding it in a global governance framework. This is a daunting task, ridden by the aforementioned tension (if not overt conflict) between transnationalism and neo-mercantilism. European regionalism has grown, at least in recent decades, more complex, ambivalent and contested. Having met the natural limits of enlargement, the EU has now to develop a broader substantive foreign policy, inspired by a vision of external projection that is, first and foremost, consistent with functional internal institutions and external security needs.

In her *Continent by Default*, Anne Marie Le Gloannec (2017) conducts a thought-provoking critique of EU’s polity-building and external dimension. To her, the Union has developed a narrow geopolitical vision which revolves on perpetual enlargement. The EU was meant to extend its reach across the entire European continent: an endeavour that could be pursued, she suggests, “absent-mindedly” and “almost by default”. After the Eastern enlargement, however, the limits of this one-sided understanding became apparent. Not only is the bordering of the European continent a contentious and increasingly contested exercise: the EU model itself has lost traction among its neighbours, deprived – as it currently is – of a real identity, a clear mission and an institutional structure able to manage internal conflict.

The empirical core of the book is an endeavour to show how the EU’s confused and often myopic management of its enlargements and neighbouring relations has multiplied core/periphery relations within and beyond EU borders. An obscure, intrusive and opportunistic system of governance and external influence, based on the elusive concept of conditionality, has fuelled dissatisfaction among governments in the peripheries and public opinions within the core, depriving integration of a defensible normative rationale. Developed incrementally and in the absence of a real foreign policy strategy, conditionality has left the EU unable to appreciate changes in its geopolitical condition – the growing threats of Islamic terrorism and Russian expansionism – to deal with partners unwilling or unable to enact deep internal reforms – from the UK to Turkey – and to deal

effectively with the cumulation of crises in its neighbourhood, from the Western Balkans to Georgia and Syria.

The rhetoric of conditionality has helped EU decision-makers to treat severe political problems as technical or legalistic issues. In so doing, however, it has weakened the political and normative rationale of the Union's external projection, disqualifying it as the exercise of some form of controlled "gravitational pull" on neighbouring territories. Disregarding the issue, the EU has insisted on its strategy of conditionality, with contingent adaptations that reinforced peripheralization rather than problem-solving. In recent decades, each enlargement and each geopolitical crisis has had its own peculiarities, which would have required both greater focus and a grand strategy. On every occasion, the EU acted situationally, but without really adapting to the new challenges it faced. Having lost its distinctiveness and external appeal, the Union eventually compromised the very force of attraction on which its "continent by default" approach ultimately relied.

Overall, Le Gloannec contends that the regional order that the EU has tried to establish is exhausted. A re-ordering of European integration requires a novel foreign policy approach, cognizant of the uncertainties of the present geopolitical condition of the Union. Several scenarios are open, from slow demise to the adoption of a new model of integration, less dependent on territorial contiguity and more reliant on network relations among subnational entities. What, according to Le Gloannec, is anyhow required is greater assertiveness *vis-à-vis* external threats, which entails being loyal to democratic and humanitarian values (domestically and abroad) and ready to abandon dysfunctional common policies, opportunistic new applicants and reluctant members. The EU should do less but better – possibly through a variable geometry approach – and more assertively push its (undependable) neighbours towards modernisation and democracy. By lowering the breadth and scope of integration and by refocusing its ambitions on existential threats, the EU, Le Gloannec suggests, may finally embrace its internal diversity as a strength, rather than a weakness, regaining international leverage.

In sum, *Continent by Default* furnishes evidence from Europe to substantiate some of the theoretical insights of recent regionalist studies. The interplay among economic interests, security concerns, bordering and bonding are evident in the ambiguous nature of conditionality and in the increasingly contested notions of continent and neighbourhood(s) in Europe. The book's policy recommendations are similarly in tune with the regionalist scholarship stressing the potential of societal dynamics and informal modes of integration. Although encouraging, the argument that the EU should go back to the basics of its model – democratic modernisation and unity in diversity – to develop a more assertive geopolitical stance

is nonetheless a strong simplification, rooted in an ideological reading of the Union's global role. Moreover, it leaves the reader with little guidance on how to embed European integration within a global governance framework, and on whether to prioritise multilateralism or bilateralism.

Two more recent books look, from a European viewpoint, to the multilateralism/bilateralism cleavage after the global crisis and the US "Pivot to Asia": Megan Dee (2015)'s *The European Union in a Multipolar World*, and *Deepening the EU-China Partnership*, edited by Mario Telò, Ding Chun, and Zhang Xiaotong (2018).

Dee's book is an accessible take on a topic with great importance beyond its narrow thematic field. The author starts by asking why the multilateral turn of international trade is weakening the EU as a regional economic block, before furnishing a dense narrative account of the WTO's troubled Doha Development Agenda (1996-2013) and the EU's changing role in its unfolding. The conclusions discuss the prospects of the EU as one of the architects of multilateralism. Convincingly, Dee argues that the emergence of new industrial economies has shifted the focus of international trade agreements from tariffs to regulatory standards, increasing their complexity, sensitiveness and domestic impact. New strategic options have emerged between protectionism and free trade, at both the national and regional levels, leading to the hybridisation of international cooperation and integration, as highlighted by Telò, Söderbaum and other studies discussed above. Because the EU is the most economically integrated region of the world but also a customs union among advanced industrial powers with politically sensitive agricultural sector, it experiences trade multilateralism as an existential dilemma.

Dee combines insights from realism, liberalism and constructivist "role theory" to conceptualise several possible approaches to multilateral trade agreements in order to explain why and how the EU has repeatedly changed course during the "Doha Round". Unable to stimulate reciprocal concessions among advanced and emerging economies in the early 2000s, the EU acknowledged its loss of influence, slowly falling back on more defensive positions and eventually lending support to the 2013 "Doha-Lite" outcome. Dee's narrative is encompassing and well-written and her periodisation seems convincing; her theorisation, however, does little more than 'naming' a large – possibly excessive – number of roles for the Union, producing a structured description of its inconsistent negotiating style.

Conversely, Dee does a good job in reassuring readers disappointed by the outcome of the negotiations that the Union behaved pragmatically and constructively. Instead of myopically defending its own multi-polar vision, the EU 'practised' multilateralism by scaling down its ambitions, decoupling issues from its initial agenda and exploring alternative ways to bring

partners and competitors to the negotiating table. This is a simple but reasonable reading of the Doha round. It is also an encouraging interpretation of how parallel and intersecting projects of cooperation and integration – unavoidable ambiguities and contradictions notwithstanding – can strengthen global governance by making it less ideological and more adaptive. From this perspective, an ideal complement of EU actorness within the WTO is a strong bilateral partnership with China.

A new book edited by Mario Telò (Telò, Chun and Xiaotong 2018) offers an informative and authoritative take on this complex and still contentious issue. The book stresses the institutionalisation, scope and versatility of EU-China cooperation and the lack, over the “long durée”, of serious security concerns. The first part of the book compares how the two actors see multipolarism and multilateralism. It suggests that both players can find common ground not only in their dissatisfaction with the legacy of US unilateralism, but also in their willingness to reconcile principles and pragmatism. After 40 years of partnership, the EU and China have activated several joint initiatives, some of them characterised by high potential for spillover and distinctive polity-building implications. They have grown more assertive and aware of their responsibility for regional and global governance, but also more pragmatic and, therefore, less threatening to each other.

The institutionalisation of Sino-European relations has changed the agenda of the two players, orienting both of them towards “sustainable development” and fostering reciprocal involvement in infrastructural investments. In the process, both partners have learned to appreciate bilateralism as a tool for, rather than as an alternative to, global governance. At the same time, the EU and China are still divided by deep cultural differences concerning sovereignty, humanitarianism and external projection over their respective neighbourhoods. The two partners may choose to de-emphasise them, but their relationship is vulnerable to historical contingencies impacting on each other’s core security and development concerns. Hence, the dense interplay of either actor with global players operating in the other’s immediate neighbourhood – the US and ASEAN for China, Russia and Africa for the EU – may activate destabilising tensions or, alternatively, contribute to further rapprochement. Insofar as empathy and commonality of vision among individual leaders has proved immensely important for successful cooperation, leadership change should be listed as another source of unpredictability.

Overall, the thematic chapters of the book suggest that the EU-China partnership is at a critical juncture, where political agency is required to exploit the opportunities offered by ongoing institutional dynamics. Progress cannot be taken for granted: the viability of cooperation on key issues such as trade settlements, legal cooperation, climate governance and inter-

national peace-keeping is open-ended: at once promising and paralysing. Thus, for instance, if a commitment to sustainable development has been a breakthrough in Sino-European cooperation, neo-mercantilist tensions may surge as both economies seek a repositioning in the post-crisis global value chain. On many topics, convergence requires reaching a common understanding, if not a common language and sense of appropriateness, which equally depend on long-established transactions and short-term political statements and initiatives. The idea of “principled pragmatism” developed by both partners over the last 25 years once again is a baseline upon which shared understandings can be built on substantive issues. The centrality of technology on many fronts of EU-China cooperation is also beneficial to the emergence of transnational ties and to the adoption of a future-oriented mindset, as in the case of climate change. Trade disputes on the adoption of new standards, however, may trigger further neo-mercantilist confrontations.

One merit of the book’s approach in overcoming all this ambivalence and complexity is a focus on the role of domestic interests as well as transnational networks – including epistemic ones – in orienting the political debate on mutual relationship and cooperation. The contribution develops an original approach to discourse analysis, producing a vivid and dynamic account of the societal preconditions of multilateral trade. Many chapters deal with the interplay between interregionalism and multilateralism – for instance in the WTO and climate governance frameworks – reaching conclusions similar to Dee’s, but with greater emphasis on the predicaments of achieving and maintaining domestic consensus. The overall text is no easy reading, partly due to the difficulty of the topic and partly because it caters to a wide readership with diversified competences. Nonetheless, the book admirably combines scope and conciseness, historical detail and technical rigour. Despite a long list of chapters and contributors, the book is impressively cohesive in format and style, revealing superior editing work, made apparent also by the concise recapitulation given by the concluding chapter.

Drawing the bottom line from the many insights provided by Le Gloanec, Dee and Telò and co-authors, it is possible to conclude that bilateralism and multilateralism – at least for the EU – are not on a collision course. The institutionalisation of multiple patterns of international cooperation is beneficial to interdependency and the creation of shared norms. The ensuing complexity can be managed by making room for multiple forms of cooperation and – within blocks – integration: not only formal, constitutional and supranational or intergovernmental, but also informal, transnational and issue-based. At the same time, squaring the circle between bilateralism and multilateralism and keeping it viable and dynamically adaptive means taking explicit responsibility for regional and global stability.

A more assertive and self-cognizant EU has much to contribute to the solidity, effectiveness and legitimacy of a post-hegemonic global order. The same holds for China and other players on a regional scale. Assertiveness in turn implies, in certain circumstances at least, more defensive and less idealistic forms of external projection, which may beset external partnerships – bilateral or multilateral – with uncertainty and mistrust. In order to prevent escalation due to the loss of reputation and mutual trust, regional powers are required to manage their existential concerns – be they in external trade, domestic regulation or homeland security – foresightedly and predictably. Sudden course changes could instead reveal indecision and cluelessness, or be misinterpreted as attempts to aggress or retaliate. The EU's recent involvement in the Middle East and its deteriorating relations with Russia are, from this perspective, the major reason to doubt the EU's stewardship amid the subtleties of contemporary regionalism. Is this an exaggeration or a reasonable concern?

4. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE SECURITY CHALLENGE

As already pointed out by Fabbrini, Telò and others in this review, the most momentous transformation of a post-hegemonic order is the decentralisation of security-related tasks. For the EU, this means developing a full-fledged foreign and security policy able to withstand Russian protagonism and, eventually, aggression.

In *Europe's Eastern Crisis*, Richard Youngs (2017) sets out a dense narrative of the Ukrainian crisis. Geopolitical considerations, he argues, resurfaced in the EU agenda. The Union and its Member-states acted as a multi-layered foreign policy and security actor. In line with the theoretical insights discussed above, Youngs opposes mono-dimensional criticisms of EU crisis management based on realist or liberal theories. Instead, he recognises a novel sort of pragmatism and flexibility in the EU's external projection towards Russia, although he criticises its limited effectiveness. Youngs moves by and large from the same premise as Le Gloannec, arguing that the EU experienced a loss of gravitational pull *vis-à-vis* its Eastern neighbours and increasing model competition from Russia.

The new higher stakes determined a partial resumption of geopolitical reasoning based on "lite" containment but still open to cooperative solutions: a half-new strategy, which Youngs dubs "liberal-redux", that also reshaped the normal functioning of European foreign policy-making. The result was, Young contends, a "geopolitics of asymmetry". The EU resolved neither to retreat from the region nor to offer it its tutelage. It instead recalibrated its diplomacy towards each of its Eastern partners, first and foremost

Ukraine and similarly modulated across different policy domains, its intransigency in handling the Russian aggressor. Because the EU is a multi-layered polity, it could effectively manage contradictions in its strategy through a division of labour between national and supranational diplomacy. However, it did not give clearly interpretable signals to other players in the area, falling short of strategic effectiveness and long-term viability.

Mapping the debate on the goals of Russia's grand strategy and the significance of its moves, Youngs presents the reader with all the uncertainty of the initial phases of the crisis. Uncertainty was also the result of the EU's past management of its Eastern partnerships. Technocratic, inward-looking and ambiguous in its real commitments, the strategy provoked Russia's misgivings without earning the trust of EU neighbours. Too confident in its low-profile approach, the Union was caught unprepared: when it tried to step up its strategy towards 'high politics' – adopting sanctions towards Russia and promising unconditional support to its Eastern partners – it soon encountered hurdles such as internal divisions, foreseeable costs on trade relations and energy supplies, as well as the risk of military escalation and NATO involvement.

The EU, in sum, had to devise a new mix of containment, cooperation and conditionality able to withstand Russia's external projection without being set off balance and dragged into "playing Putin's game". The book's major empirical contribution is to highlight the details of this adaptive strategy and trace its unfolding. The narrative suggests that the EU managed to redeploy its institutionalised ways of doing foreign policy, complementing them with high politics diplomacy under Franco-German leadership. By exercising geopolitical balancing, the EU prevented events from slipping out of control and escalate into a NATO-Russia confrontation: a scenario that would frustrate its preferred diplomatic instruments and discourse – based on conditionality-based promotion of peace, democracy and human rights – unravelling the EU's hard-won trade and diplomatic settlement in the area, opening new cleavages also among EU Member States. Marshalling evidence from his empirical chapters, Youngs carefully discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the EU's strategic logic in his concluding remarks. His analysis is thoughtful and shows the merits of his categorisation of geopolitical strategies, which furnishes a promising framework for future research.

The book holds two further key insights. First, it shows the interplay of interregional and intergovernmental dynamics in the Ukrainian crisis. The clash between two models of integration in the buffer area between Russia and Western Europe confirms that economy and security are increasingly entangled. The distinction between high politics and low politics, region-building and external projection proves untenable. The apparent limits

of both Russia's traditional geopolitics and the EU's conditionality-based neighbourhood policy testifies to how the legacy of past interactions has narrowed the set of viable foreign policy options. Second, the analysis lends some support for optimistic expectations about the inner strengths of the EU model of 'unity in diversity' in a scenario of complex interdependency. The EU long eschewed geopolitical thinking by denying Russia a real voice in the building of a regional order for Eurasia. Compounding other domestic predicaments, this invited Russia's aggressiveness. Geopolitical balancing by the EU since 2013 may have disappointed some of its supporters, but it has effectively given Russia new stakes in a consensual solution without backing down on its aggressive behaviour.

Paired with Sakwa's and Le Gloannec's analyses, that of Youngs shows the potential of interregionalism – both analytically and as a foreign policy approach – in managing territorial disputes, even within the Old Continent. His narrative supports the claim that region-building can be a virtuous layer of global governance, provided that key players in the area are able and willing to enforce a sustainable regional order and guarantee interregional peace. Over the past five years, the EU has contrived an original way to contain Russia without abandoning the old modes of its foreign and security policy. It walked a thin line, however, and exposed the narrow margins of its autonomy whenever regional security has been at stake. The biggest caveat therefore remains: the EU has unique capabilities to engineer a regional order and embed it in a global governance framework, but its inability to avert existential threats may well turn into a magnet for global disruption. The question is whether the EU is sufficiently autonomous to act not only as a regional actor but also as a regional pole.

The goal of Sven Biscop (2015)'s *Peace without Money, War without the Americans* is to assess the viability of an autonomous European security policy. Like Youngs, Biscop acknowledges the wide array of foreign policy tools to which the EU can resort. The EU, however, is paralysed by its inability to formulate priorities for a consistent strategic framework. Priorities are the key to successful EU-level involvement: a necessity due to the proven inability of even France and the UK to stage unilateral military interventions. The solution that Biscop recommends is for the EU to resume its 2003 European Security Strategy, sharpening it to meet the (interrelated) security crises at its Eastern and Southern borders.

This reorientation requires serious reconsideration of the use of force, although only as a last resort to protect the Union's vital interests, including the enforcement of international law and multilateral settlements. It also demands a more purposeful management of external relations and the ability to take responsibility as a collective over the medium-long term. Diplomacy requires commitment, not autopiloting: it cannot be compar-

timentalised as either NATO or EU initiatives, nor can it be forced into the logic of budgetary planning and squeezed into its schedules and routines. While these recommendations may sound commonsensical, Biscop provides a sophisticated and informed discussion of why and how they matter for a successful common foreign policy. His work is rich in analysis and advice about how the EU could develop autonomy of vision and intervention, military and civilian.

The bottom line of Biscop's book, though, is the importance of defining a strategy able to link, in an understandable and defensible way, the EU's vital goals to the resources needed to pursue them on the ground. True strategies, he argues, help decision makers to evaluate the significance of unforeseen contingencies, to try to shape future events and to communicate with the public and other players. They thus need to state clearly how an actor intends to pursue its interests and values. Agreed at the times of the Iraq war, the European Security Strategy fulfilled these desiderata, but failed to specify a hierarchy of objectives able to guarantee cooperation and coordinate intervention across levels. The goal of a European strategy should be to allocate scarce means to common goals, which is especially relevant to means that require pooling or concerted action. This requires defining priorities over the medium term – which means goals compatible with longstanding European values and interests – and gathering adequate means, military, civilian and geostrategic, to realise them.

Biscop also argues that the EU failed to grasp the security obligations of its neighbourhood policy. Stressing the interconnections among the crises in Ukraine, Libya, Mali and Syria, he contends that the EU must put bilateralism at the service of multilateralism, using its present network of partnerships to forge issue-specific ad-hoc coalitions. This is the reason why full-blown confrontation with Russia is not an option – although it is indeed with the Islamic State – and why the EU would better make its values and interests unambiguously clear to the global public. At the same time, the EU must acknowledge that its multi-layered and fragmented security architecture is costly and outdated. Without US support – logistical, military and financial – the EU has neither the sword nor the purse to assume credible security commitments. This 'recipe for disaster' would aggravate the geopolitical irrelevance of the EU and its present lack of coordination, producing enduring disorder at the periphery of the continent.

Biscop's book is not only a pleasant and instructive reading. It is also a farsighted work, still up-to-date three years after its publication. Paired with Youngs's more recent analysis of the Ukrainian crisis, it offers a sound practical framework within which to assess the merits and demerits of the EU's geopolitics. Youngs has largely confirmed Biscop's expectations. The EU proved good at diplomacy and effective in deploying an array of policy

instruments wider than those available to NATO or another ad-hoc coalition. A functional division of labour emerged between expediency at the national level and critical mass at the supranational one, which made it possible to contain Russia without resorting to hard-security means. This confirms the impression that the EU wisely stuck to a strategy with which it felt comfortable, translating comfort into autonomy and the latter into effectiveness. At the same time, however, the EU failed to be clear about its strategy and to foresee the interplay of different crises. It failed to specify the value added of supranational intervention and to adopt new common instruments for more effective capability on the ground. Finally, the Union is still lacking a convincing response to the impact of Brexit on its overall military capacity.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has reviewed ten recent books contributing to the regionalist debate, with a focus on the interplay between European integration and global governance. The line of argument that the paper has drawn from the studies reviewed suggests that the EU can indeed reconcile integration and global governance, primarily by taking responsibility for the security concerns of its region and neighbourhood.

Success seems to require a reform of internal governance and a restructuring of the Union's multi-layered architecture. One pillar of this reform would be to speed up integration towards clear foreign policy priorities based on a careful assessment of the added value of supranational external projection. Another pillar, however, would be to develop a framework for internal and external cooperation that would enable the Member States to advance European interests by acting singularly or in small groups, resorting to their specific assets and networks, formal or informal, intergovernmental or transnational. The EU's deepening partnership with China and qualified success in dealing with Russia on the Ukrainian front hold important lessons for devising such a system. New regionalist scholarship, in turn, is developing analytical tools useful to address the uncertainties of the new global scenario.

Speaking of cooperation, rather than integration, in Europe could entail a scenario of spillback or disintegration, as Dosenrode and his co-authors may suggest. One should not forget, however, the lesson given by Telò, Söderbaum and other reviewed contributors. European integration is nothing but a model of regional governance and region-building: one that has proved spectacularly successful on some fronts, but also ridden by several shortcomings, including a tendency to remove politics when hard deci-

sions must be taken. Following the example of successful alternative models of region-building, such as ASEAN or MERCOSUR, a more pragmatic mix of supranationalism, intergovernmentalism and transnationalism can be devised on the Old Continent as well. A looser and more experimental form of integration – less gubernatorial and more open to transnational agency and advocacy – might offer greater adaptive capacity, especially in fields where traditional integration is sclerotic.

If cohesiveness and diffuse reciprocity are the overarching goals, they can hardly be achieved through dysfunctional ‘common policies’, “gold-plates” – as Biscop calls them – just giving new names to obsolete and deeply segmented policy architectures. Reciprocal loyalty can only be sustained by a sense of ‘shared fate’ among the members of the Union: an ‘emergent’ identity that – once bestowed on top of Westphalian statehood – ought to reshape national preferences as much in intergovernmental settings as in supranational ones. A well-functioning core of supranational policies with clear value added and a consistent and defensible mission for the EU polity can generate a similar sense of Europeanness far better than formal institutional frameworks. Experience suggests that policies that are ‘common’ or ‘European’ in name only are meant to remain dead letter.

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