

REGIONALISM AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE:
THE ALTERNATIVE BETWEEN POWER POLITICS
AND NEW MULTILATERALISM

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ABSTRACT

Regional cooperation among neighboring states in the current world is not only about free trade. It is a consolidated multidimensional reality in every continent since decade as shown by a large comparative literature in various disciplines exploring similarities and diversities, endogenous drivers and exogenous factors. One of the main differences is between the democratic type defined “new regionalism” by the international epistemic community since the '90s and the more recent authoritarian and hierarchical model of top-down regional cooperation. The article is addressing a crucial question: how does this complex reality interplay with multilateral global governance, notably in hard times of crisis and coming back of power politics? The article explores various forms of regional and interregional cooperation and concludes by drafting three scenarios: a) a transformation of regional organizations into spheres of influences of great powers; b) a multilayered global governance as the driver of a new more legitimate and efficient multilateralism; c) a mixed and weaker global governance, combining in a unstable and uncertain way, fragmentation, power politics, democratic multilateralism, functional cooperation.

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1. AN UNPRECEDENTED MULTIPOLARITY

How might multilateral cooperation not only survive in a multipolar world characterized by both increasing cultural diversity within regions

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and hard power politics symbolized by the “gang of the four”? (Putin, Trump, Modi, Xi Jinping). After decades of dialogues with the epistemic communities of other continents, and three edited books published on “multiple modernities, cultural diversities and global governance” (Meyer and de Sales Marques 2018; Meyer, Telò and Sales Marques 2019, Meyer, Telò and Sales Marques 2020), we prefer talking about *multilateralisms* as a plural noun. Multilateralizing the current multipolar power structure is possible only provided a rigorous respect of various approaches, cultures and practices of multilateral cooperation coming from the different continents. of course this does not mean submitting to cultural relativism and fragmentation; rather our research suggests that we should be looking for unprecedented terms of multilateral convergence. And, second question, as a driving force, may regional and interregional arrangements, rather than part of the problem, be part of the solution in paving the way to new forms of multilateral convergence? That is the focus of this article.

A leading Chinese liberal thinker, Qin Yaqing and an Indian leading scholar, A. Acharya, argue that regionalisms might dovetail with multilateralisms only provided that every partner recognizes that the legacy of US hegemonic multilateralism is over (Acharya 2014; Qin 2018). We share the idea that the current global governance crisis is not a crisis of liberal multilateralism as such, but of a particular form it took under the long and currently declining US hegemony. Second, it is a matter of facts that multilateral cooperation is expanding as a multilayered cooperation: in a context of power shifts and enhanced multipolar confrontation, we are witnessing a development, an ambiguous evolution, or a dramatic reappraisal of regional and interregional cooperation projects. While regionalism is about relations among neighboring countries belonging to the same continent, interregionalism bridges different continents.

In the mentioned books, P. Katzenstein speaks about “polymorphic globalism” and T. Meyer of diverse “socio-cultural milieus”: this approach goes beyond the trivial focus on instrumental power politics. The question is how might such a various regional cooperation among neighbors and interregional dialogues (and/or trade arrangements) between geographically distant partners contribute to a new post-hegemonic multilateralism?

The interlinked phenomena of regionalism and interregionalism are both essential aspects of the current debate about the evolution of multilateral cooperation in a context of cultural diversity and power politics. Students of comparative politics will find it instructive to follow the lead of Andrew Gamble, Louise Fawcett and the vast literature on regionalism in exploring the achievements and failures of alternative regional models.

Interregionalism concerns intercontinental relationships among diverse models and cultures of modernity. Should we regard the contours emerging in the post-hegemonic era as a shift towards an intercultural clash between irreconcilable regions (Huntington 1996) or as the potential start of a new multidimensional dialogue between diverse partners. Nationalism, fragmentation, power politics, populism could seriously undermine both regional and multilateral forms of cooperation. The traditional global order is contested both inside and outside the states. How should comparative studies interplay with a new multilateralist research agenda?

2. CONTROVERSIAL DEBATES ABOUT THE CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER

One major, and highly controversial, field of controversies focuses on the evolving global power framework. Beyond the well-publicized divergent viewpoints articulated by Fukuyama (1992) and Huntington (1996) in the aftermath of the Cold War, and the poor literature on US unipolarism and “empire”, various theses have been developed about the decline of the global American hegemonic order (Keohane 2015; Acharya 2014; Kupchan 2012). Haass (2008) has argued that the world is moving towards a fragmented, a-polar system as US framing power recedes. By contrast, Ikenberry and Deudney (2018) remain convinced that global institutions are robust and resilient enough to cope with the new historic challenges, like nationalism and populism. Nevertheless, they add, the world still needs a more inclusive, and flexible kind of American hegemony. Realist literature focuses on the ‘gang of the four’ power politics, aggressing multilateralism, regionalism and international law. Surprisingly, the pessimistic front has enrolled Allison (2017), who forecasts the possible, though not inevitable, shift from trade wars to military rivalry between the two main powers, the declining United States and the emerging China. An unstable neo-bipolar scenario for the next decade (“Thucydides’ trap”) would confirm the conviction that international politics will never change, and competitive power politics will prevail on cooperation. Similar arguments have surfaced in China and elsewhere (see for example Yan 2019).

Turning to the EU, why cannot EU replace the US as Western hegemonic power in spite of the deepening transatlantic rift? And why do European innovative thinkers understand excessive emphasis on national sovereignty as a risk and potential threat for peace? For two reasons: first because for the EU multilateralism and cooperative governance beyond the nation-State are a “way of life”, the internal regular practice of sharing and pooling national sovereignties since 70 years. They are reviving an ancient tradition by strengthening the supranational dimension of multilateralism:

the first steps towards multilateralism as civilizing-national sovereignty were accomplished in the context of the Concert of Europe during the entire 19th century, after the Napoleon defeat (Telò 2014). The alternative nationalist tragic model provoked the two world wars. Secondly, because the EU is since a decade again internally challenged by the new nationalist, populist, and far right parties. They radically oppose not only the EU but also immigrants and peaceful cooperation. This challenge is serious and can be won only by a successful global and regional multilateralism, notably a successful cooperation with China. Why is this challenge serious? The dilemmas of continental Europe are expressions of the internal conflictual co-existence of two logics. On the one hand, we have the EU's institutional paradigm of reconciliation among erstwhile enemies, designed to put an end to "security dilemmas" and foster cooperation through a strong governance beyond the state. On the other, we are witnessing the neo-nationalist trend, animated by "populist realism" (Qin 2018). Even though it performed poorly in the 2019 European Parliament elections and has been chastened by the new EU leadership, nationalism and populist far right parties remain a long term challenge, oscillating between the radical followers of Brexit and the opportunistic fighters for a weaker and more confederal EU: Kacinsly, Orban, Salvini, Le Pen. These big troubles are affecting the cultural arena as well.

For example, in France the *Déclaration de Paris* (Bénéton *et al.* 2018) has revived catholic, anti-Pope Francis, and reactionary nationalist associations that were once deemed outmoded. Consider the lineup of those who advocate neo-nationalist paradigms: Alain de Benoist (2019) and, within a different cultural context, Michel Onfray (2017), on the one hand, and Alain Finkielkraut (2016) and even Régis Debray (2019), on the other. All contest the previously-dominant paradigm of post-sovereignism championed by scholars like Badie (1999), Bourdieu (1999), and Hassner (1991).

In Italy extreme right nationalism is culturally weak after WW2. However, the comeback of the old "geopolitics" has been accompanied by the revival of national fascist thought, while extreme right-wing populists are inspired not only by Mussolini but also by Ezra Pound and the Russian Alexander Dugin. The Europeanist perspective articulated by the three largest cultural streams, Christian, liberal and left, was and is still hegemonic in the intellectual arena, thanks to the influence of Norberto Bobbio (1999), Altiero Spinelli (cf. Glencross and Trechsel 2010), Umberto Eco (2012) and many others.

Even in Germany, the by far most representative thought of J. Habermas's and his post-national ideas of a European public sphere and European constitutional patriotism, based on the reconciliation of previous enemies and the construction of supranational democratic governance, has been

challenged increasingly, not only by the reemerging legacy of the sovereignist far right tradition championed by Carl Schmitt, but also by various neo-nationalist approaches, including the “social Welfare nationalism” of Fritz Scharpf (2015) and Wolfgang Streeck (2013).

The victory of nationalism would bring to new inter-state tensions, like in the past. This makes a difference with mainstream thought in developing countries like China and India. While the Europeans are mainly concerned with nationalism as a tendency against internal peace and external multilateral cooperation, developing countries intellectual are often focusing on their history of developing country making them free from colonialism by the concepts of national sovereignty and non-interference. This difference explains to a large extent the different accents in International relations theories.

It is worthwhile to draw some analogies between the current pluralist debate in China about the coming world disorder/order and alternative scenarios and the three main alternative paradigms within the IR debate currently going on in that country. On the one side, the most creative advocate of “moral neo-realist” thought, Yan Xuetong, forecasts a resurgent bipolar structure for the international system. Even though it will not necessarily provoke a war, the coming “new bipolarism” (Yan 2019) is driven by the economic, trade, and security competition and increasing military tension between two alternative models of modernization: those of the US and China.

On the other side, two post-realist approaches have emerged clearly in China as well. First, the idea of “all under heaven” (Zhao 2016) represents a Confucian vision of the global Sino-centric harmony, where international politics could be transformed into “friendly relations”. That would mean something similar to the European concept of “diffuse” as opposed to “specific” reciprocity (Telò 2015, 2017). Second and more important, there is an emerging alternative paradigm that combines divergences and convergences, as embodied in Qin’s interpretation of traditional Chinese thought. That approach builds bridges to the contemporary global debate in international relations theory. Qin is attempting to develop a new post-hegemonic, pluralist, and participatory form of multilateralism that would include openness to various regional models and interregional partnerships as well as forging ties of cooperation.

On a *de facto* basis, these national debates converge drawing two alternative scenarios for the future. The world is headed either toward hard power politics, based on a multipolar or bipolar confrontation, or toward a heterogeneous system that features new forms of multilateral cooperation. Logically, only the latter paradigm is potentially respectful of the “constraining cultural diversities” and the plurality of actors (whatever na-

tional or regional) that characterize our current situation. And only the latter offers other global actors – such as the EU, the African Union, ASEAN, and MERCOSUR – a relevant role in regional, interregional, and global governance. Only a comparative analysis may confirm whether the EU is an isolated case study or part of a long term structural change of multilateral global governance.

3. COMPARING REGIONAL AND INTERREGIONAL RELATIONS

Interregional relations are understudied even though they are crucial in modifying the debate about the global order and the development of regional entities. The first conceptual debate about the role of interregional relations started in the 1990s, under the auspices of the “Rio process” between the EU and Latin America. The ASEM, which celebrated its 12th summit in Ulaanbaatar on October 18, 2018, was launched in Bangkok in 1996. Many scholars also would include the former ACP, started in 1973 via the Yaoundé Convention, in the same conceptual framework because the EU’s partners in that organization were located in other parts of the world: namely, Africa, Oceania, and Central America. Multiple conceptual controversies emerged in the academic world around the turn of the new century. At that time, it became clear that the US had developed its own interregional relationships, based on Fred Bergsten’s theory of “emerging markets” (Bergsten 1994). These included ties with Latin America (the FTAA, formed in 1994, which failed in 2005); with Asia and the Pacific (APEC, formed in 1994); and with Europe (the new Transatlantic Agenda of the 1990s). For its part, the EU – in the context of its new ambitions as global actor – negotiated almost a dozen parallel strategic partnerships (with China in 2003, India in 2004, Brazil in 2007, and seven more later on) and several trade arrangements with individual countries. These initiatives raised some important theoretical issues: e.g., whether in a *de facto* sense such strategic partnerships (as well as some EPA with single African countries) were opposed to region-to-region partnerships, and/or to bloc-to-bloc relations (Santander 2016).

However, the majority of the epistemic community shares a flexible and comprehensive concept of interregional relations which could be summarized as follows: “multidimensional relations between one region, on the one hand, and a region or a large state on the other, belonging to two or three different continents”. By this definition, the EU-China partnership, BRI, TTIP, and TPP all would count as interregional relations. To characterize this second type of interregional relations with greater precision, the concept of “hybrid interregionalism” has been proposed and now is

shared by several scholars (Rüland 2015; Soederbaum *et al.* 2016; Fawcett *et al.* 2015).

The main point to be brought out here is that a regional organization may play a decisive role as at least one of the partners within a scheme of interregional cooperation. In this respect, we are witnessing a multiplication of interregional relations, such as those launched by ASEAN, MERCOSUR, and the African Union.¹

By this encompassing definition it is possible to assert that not only regional cooperation among neighbors but also interregional relations are structural features of an increasingly multilayered system of global governance in which the global level of the multilateral set is no longer the sole framework for institutionalized cooperation. As a significant development of the UN Charter of 1945, the balance between the regional/interregional level of governance and the global level is shifting in favor of the former. Both Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan recognized, on behalf of the UN, the increasing relevance of the sub-global (notably the regional) dimension of governance in helping to prevent or manage conflicts and establish economic cooperation. The fact that two UN Secretary-Generals saw the value of regionalism itself has had an impact, helping to sustain regional organizations and foster regional identities.

But there is another, less positive take on this trend. Globalist economic liberals, reflecting on the place of such ties within the system of global governance (Bhagwati 1992), likely might see regionalism and interregionalism as a symptom of the fragmentation of the global framework. However, undoubtedly, regional cooperation eventually encourages interregional ties, trade partnerships, and sometimes even cultural dialogues. Thus, the normative criticisms that leveled by Bhagwati against regional and interregional trade arrangements are outdated, but his remarks suggest a different and stimulating observation. Regional and interregional arrangements may be driven by factors other than trade interests. As scholars of the new regionalism assert, the explosion of these phenomena can be analyzed comparatively as a trend towards a “world of regions” (Katzenstein 2005), a *longue durée* and structural process of multilayered transformation of global governance (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995; Hettne *et al.* 2001; Hettne 2008; Telò 2001, 2016; Risse and Börzel 2016; Gamble and Payne 1996). Normative condemnations in the name of economic neo-liberalism seem inappropriate for a multidisciplinary research agenda. Regions devel-

¹ According to the EU trade commissioner the EU negotiations with individual countries are a stepping stone towards bloc to bloc negotiations, which are the objective of the EU trade policy (interview in Brussels, October 16 2018).

op their own identities and interregional relations, including by trade arrangements. Such regional relationships are no longer a matter of mere rational choice alone; instead, they reflect political decisions, as well as shared values, standards, and ways of life.

All in all, the development of multipurpose regionalism and interregionalism also can be seen as the only way possible to revive and reform global multilateralism, by enhancing not only its efficiency but also its legitimacy. In this way, the new regionalism goes beyond the limits of the famous debate between Bhagwati and Summers in the early '90s, which was limited to trade dimensions (see Morin *et al.* 2015; De Block and Lebullinger 2018).

In terms of its theoretical implications, interregionalism is a form of multidimensional and multilateral cooperation that may include dialogue between cultural identities and feelings of common belonging: they, together, may help to ward off, or at least to limit, international anarchy, nationalism, competition, ethnocentrism, protectionism, and fragmentation. Interregionalism belongs to the realm of new complex institutional sets and frameworks, operating within a highly contested scheme of global governance. In these ways, it challenges and transcends the old realist thought, even if the latter appears to have made a comeback, being revived by the nationalist challenge posed by “populist realism” (Qin 2018) in many countries.

4. HISTORY OF EUROPEAN INTERREGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

A relevant debate within the international epistemic community has concerned the evolution of interregional relations in the aftermath of the Cold War. During the first decade, which Gamble (2014) has termed the era of “liberal peace”, the Clinton approach to regional cooperation (inspired by F.Bergsten) was a turning point: Clinton moved from the traditional global multilateralism to regional (NAFTA) and interregional multilateralism; however, his change was essentially economic and based on instrumental rationality, focusing on free trade areas in the three directions mentioned above. That approach adjusted the hegemonic style (hegemonic in the sense meant by Keohane, 1984): USA input to regime building. The Clinton approach therefore would contain the hegemonic decline of the United States, which began in 1971 with the end of the Gold standard system based on the Dollar. Nevertheless, it was consistent with the so-called IMF “Washington Consensus” and Western neoliberal culture. In the three cases – APEC, FTAA, and New Transatlantic Agenda – it sparked bitter conflicts with deeper regional organizations such as MERCOSUR in

Latin America, ASEAN in the Asia-Pacific zone, and the EU in the transatlantic area. Why? Because these three examples of deeper regional cooperation encompassed political and cultural dimensions as well, which were incompatible with the USA's neo-hegemonic and rational-choice approach to FTAs and international relations.

The effort by George W. Bush to subordinate this legacy of interregional agendas to security concerns after 2001 – the era of “liberal war”, according to Gamble (2014) – sharpened the resistance of the various partners. As a result, the interregional projects of the US largely went nowhere. This debacle confirmed the dead lock of the attempts by Clinton and by G.H.W. Bush to revive the declining hegemonic, US-led multilateralism by relying on interregional arrangements, whether focused on free trade or security. Such interregional setbacks were paralleled by the shortcomings of the WTO-DDR from Seattle (2000) to Cancun (2003) and the failure of the “liberal wars” in Iraq and Afghanistan. A superficial literature focused on the Imperial momentum (by opposite value judgement, positive or negative), whereas precisely the limits of the American power emerged as evident.

During the same period, the Southeast Asian economic crisis provoked a regionalist reaction against the IMF and the Washington Consensus through the deepening and widening of the ASEAN integration process. The latter began expanding into monetary, political, and cultural fields. For example, the “Chang Mai Initiative” for a regional fund that began in 2000 was supported by ASEAN, China, Japan, and South Korea.

Some of the most prominent academics at this time, at least in the field of international relations, still focused on comparing the competing US-led and EU-led interregional endeavors. Two main differences between the approaches of the EU and USA, as underlined by B. Hettne (2007), stood out. First, while the EU's interregional relations were multipurpose (economic, cultural, environmental, social, and political), US-led arrangements were either only free trade-oriented or security-oriented (e.g., in the realm of anti-terrorism). EU interregionalism included three baskets: socio/cultural and environmental cooperation, economic cooperation, and political dialogue. That approach could be considered an example of the gradual politicization of interregional partnerships in defense of multilateralism. The condemnation of the United States' preventive war in Iraq by the EU-CELAC interregional meeting of 2003 in Guadalajara suggests what such politicization might accomplish.

A second difference in this regard is that interregional relations started by the EU typically supported multidimensional regional integration abroad (MERCOSUR, ASEAN, SAARC, ECOWAS, AU etc.), whereas US-led efforts were at cross-purposes with deeper regional integration. The

EU approach made it possible to engage in various form of regionalist “diffusion” and “emulation” (Risse and Börzel 2016), while avoiding excessive mimesis and gradually overcoming the early arrogant normative emphasis on the “EU model” and “normative power” (Manners 2002).

5. THE EMERGENCE OF COMPETING AND AUTHORITARIAN FORMS OF REGIONALISM AND INTERREGIONALISM

Since 2010, the international scholarly debate has changed dramatically due to the economic and financial crisis, the rapid emergence of China, and the rise of the BRICS. An issue raised years ago by Hettne (2007) has gained saliency in the present political context: do interregional relations facilitate the cohesion of regional partners or are they more likely to divide and disintegrate the partner organization as a bloc? Well it largely depends on the driver. Bloc-to-bloc negotiations (e.g., EU/ASEAN, EU/AU and EU/MERCOSUR) are an identity marker in which each partner has a direct mirror interest in mutually supporting the other’s current and future integration. The EU’s policy on cooperation with ASEAN for disaster relief and security issues provides a positive example (cf. GEM research, notably that by Tercovich 2019). In what follows, we will try to assess whether interregional factors spur integration or division around the world. As will become apparent, the role of the leading partner – whether that be the US, Russia, China, and the EU – is often decisive in determining the answer.

Under the Trump administration, the US has been abandoning the enhanced global role sought by President Obama through mega-interregional trade arrangements. The turning point was Trump’s decision to delegitimize the global multilateral network (WTO and its panels) and to dismantle the final attempt to revive US interregional hegemony through the TPP and TTIP. The only alternative to those efforts that Trump accepts – aside from national protectionism and trade wars – is to undertake hierarchical revisions of previous regional and interregional arrangements that allegedly will favor US interests, if only in symbolic terms. Regional arrangements in the wake of NAFTA illustrate this tendency. NAFTA was transformed into USMCA in order to put the US first even in the acronym while deleting the acronym FTA. We may define this sort of regionalism as a form of hierarchical transactionalism, the opposite of true multilateral regionalism. In the event that the USA should propose the same for US relations with Japan, the UK, China, and the EU relations, heightened tensions will occur. The driving force as well as the partner matter: its domestic and international politics and its vision of the best possible combination of bilateralism, interregionalism, and multilateralism.

In this context it is notable that both the US under Trump and Russia under Putin explicitly seek the dismemberment of the EU. Putin is funding far right, anti-EU nationalist parties in order to weaken and divide the Union. For his part, Trump famously proposed Brexit to EU member states as a model and described NATO as “obsolete”, throwing the organization into a crisis that may presage its decline. These policies imperil transatlantic interregionalism, much as the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement vitiated prospects for enhanced transpacific cooperation.

Particularly relevant for the future of pan-European, East/West interregional relations is the way that Putin’s policies toward Georgia and Ukraine have transformed the potentially complementary EU and Eurasian constructs into strategically competing projects. Under this new regime, defections from the Eurasian Community in favor of pro-EU arrangements may be either punished by military invasion, as has occurred in eastern Ukraine, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, or subjected to blackmail by the withholding of energy supplies, as happened to Armenia. To be sure, Russia’s conduct was motivated by what it perceived to be the threat in its own backyard posed by NATO’s eastward expansion after 1991. Still, that conduct, which led to the EU’s unanimous sanctions against Russia, indicate the dangerous collapse of the peaceful pan-European interregional architecture established after 1990-1991, as embodied in the Council of Europe, OSCE, Russia-NATO Council, and strategic partnership between the EU and Russia.

Authoritarian regimes like Putin’s Russia currently work to foster regional and interregional cooperation. Typically, they do so for geopolitical defensive advantages, or when they think that such moves will promote autocracy and/or a “hard” version of multipolarity. However, as far as Putin’s vision and practice of regional cooperation is concerned, the absence of democracy, bottom-up drivers, and civil society actors, all are factors limiting regional cooperation. Furthermore, one must consider the internal mechanisms enabling or constraining relations between autocrats. In this context, security is the main engine of regime-building. Because of its internal rules and procedures, this top-down, hierarchical version of regionalism cannot be multilateral. Notwithstanding these limits, it is very interesting that today large states, including Russia, want to coordinate policies at the regional level, thus moving, to some extent, beyond the old imperial concept of spheres of influence that prevailed in the 19th century. Interregional relations may matter by shaping the future of regional entities characterized by alternative values and identities. So, on the one hand, the EU potentially could influence potential members of the Eurasian community, such as Moldova, Ukraine, and the Caucasus. On the other hand, China’s regional policy in central Asia, notably the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (with its “Chinese characteristics”), may be critical in the future evolution of the EAEU.

As far as the EU is concerned, the quasi-continental enlargement policy, reflected in that body’s growth from 12 to 28 member states plus 5 applicants, is widely regarded as a success-story even if Brexit may challenge this vision. By contrast, the EU’s attempt to establish interregional relationships with the “arc of crisis” countries, from Ukraine and Belarus to Libya and the Arab nations – exemplified in the “Barcelona process” and the European neighborhood policy – largely can be judged a quasi-failure, at least so far, and a challenge awaiting future resolution. Cultural cleavages do affect this failure, not only on the southern flank (cf. the poor record of the EU’s multiple attempts at a cultural dialogue with Islam), but also on the eastern flank, as shown by the oscillating relationship with Moldova, the Caucasus states, and Belarus, and the deadlock in educational and cultural cooperation with Russia. The latter shows up in the frozen bilateral strategic partnerships between the EU and Russia in both the Council of Europe (regarding the crucial dimension of human rights protection) and OSCE (regarding the monitoring of democratic transitions).

Comparative studies offer evidence of the authoritarian evolution of top-down regional cooperation organizations elsewhere, notably in the cases of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The latter has been described as an instrument of Saudi Arabia’s hierarchical rule, exemplified in its campaign against Qatar, which has been accused of complicity with Iran. Another case of such authoritarian evolution is ALBA, a political instrument of the declining Venezuela. Authoritarian regionalism is an alternative model, distinct from soft/relational and deep/institutionalized regionalism based on bottom-up legitimacy and multilateral rules. The latter would include the EU, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, and to a limited extent, the African Union, no matter what the main driving factors (security, trade, or institutions) behind them may have been.

China’s interregional relations in the Xi era and the “post-peaceful rising period” that was openly proclaimed by the 19th CCP Congress are instructive. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies a unilateral interregional global project of staggering magnitude. Are China’s interregional policies in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America evolving towards a multilateral or hierarchical pattern, and are they uniting or dividing the various regional/continental partners? In regard to China’s relations to Europe, we are witnessing a paradox. For many decades the consensus among international observers was that China strongly supported the unity of the EU as well as further integration, with the purpose of counterbalancing the power of the US and the USSR/Russia. Despite recent visits to Brussels by Xi Jinping, it has become apparent that we must temper that insight. The

attempt to reach out to Europe, manifested most recently in Xi Jinping's 2018 and 2019 speeches in Davos, Brussels and at UN, has deep roots in Chinese history, extending not only back to Deng Xiaoping but even to Mao Zedong's vision of a multipolar world and a politically united Europe's balancing role both in trans-Atlantic and pan-European relations. Moreover, Xi's support for the EU runs parallel to China's controversial political and financial support for the African Union. China has offered to build the AU's headquarters in Addis Abeba and promised to upgrade Chinese investments within the AU. On the other hand, as part of its BRI, China is now institutionalizing its relationships with 17 European countries, including several EU members. Thus, in a *de facto* sense, China is thus, for the first time, dividing the EU, much to the chagrin of those in charge of the European Union's institutions.

The shift in China's European policy is part of a broader set sea change. In the Xi Jinping era, China has increased its assertiveness as a global actor. It is in the process of developing its own practices, characteristics, and ideas of global multilateralism and regionalism, both in its own neighborhood and in interregional relations with Africa and Europe (via the BRI) as well as Latin America. The China-Africa partnership has developed enormously since 2010, and these interregional economic ties are supported by political objectives.² Most analyses of China's offensive diplomacy in Africa have focused on Beijing's thirst for economic benefits in regard to energy and raw materials. That is why its behavior often is dubbed "energy diplomacy" or "economic diplomacy", implying that China, like Japan in the 1980s, seeks to become a "geo-economic power". But if one looks at the history of the PRC's foreign policy, one realizes that Beijing has seldom pursued its diplomacy based on purely economic considerations. Chinese interregionalism in Africa should be viewed through a political lens, in light of geo-strategic calculations, political and security ties with African countries, peacekeeping and anti-piracy efforts, and support for African regionalism. China's diplomatic expansion in Africa, while partially driven by its need for economic growth, cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the strategic impulses accompanying its accelerating emergence as a global power. Africa's interregional partnership is one of China's diplomatic "new frontiers", as exemplified by new Chinese leader Xi Jinping's maiden foreign trip to Africa in 2013. However, the huge FDI plan for Africa has been inter-

² China poured more than \$86 billion in commercial loans into African governments and state-owned entities between 2000 and 2014, an average of about \$6 billion a year. In 2015, at the sixth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), President Xi Jinping pledged \$60 billion in commercial loans to the region, which would increase lending to at least \$20 billion per year.

preted by some international commentators as an excellent opportunity, but also as posing a risk of division and geopolitical domination.

In short, recent events are obliging neutral observers to address the question of the nature of China's interregionalism by typing in a question mark. The deepening of relations between China, on the one hand, and 17 European countries (plus bilateral arrangements made with Portugal and Italy in 2019), on the other, is weakening the institutional role of the EU as the main coordinator of Europe's external cooperation, trade, and partnerships. They are also *de facto* strengthening Euro-skeptical sovereignist governments such as those of Orbán in Hungary, Kaczynski in Poland, and Salvini in Italy. In the context of the economic decline of southern EU member states after the financial crisis 2009-2017, it is also worthy of mention that China's decision to prioritize individual relations with single EU countries, notably with the weakest like Greece, provokes worries regarding its political designs.

The Belt and Road Initiative presents an interregional opportunity of historic importance for all, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the EU. Presented by Xi Jinping as the "project of the century", it is one of the pillars of the "Third Chinese Revolution" (after those spearheaded by Mao and Deng: cf. Economy 2018), beyond the period of the so-called "peaceful rise". It will be a crucial test for China's international politics: is interregionalism about power politics or compatible with a new multilateralism? (Telò 2020b).

The USA opposes the BRI as a major rival to its own global influence and a risky bargain for weak states. Does the launch of the BRI presage a neo-hegemonic shift? If its implementation openly serves the geopolitical interests of a single great power, thereby promoting a one-sided understanding of globalization, it will provoke resistance, criticism, and containment. Comparisons with the American Marshall Plan of 1947-1957 may be useful. The Marshall Plan's inspiration was innovative and enlightened Keynesianism. John Maynard Keynes believed that the shortcomings of the Versailles conference in 1919 stemmed from (among other things) a flawed understanding of international economic relations that he had tried and failed to correct. He ended up "winning" at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, basing the new postwar economic order on multilateral agreements. However, largely due to Stalin's opposition, the Marshall Plan by 1947 had become *de facto* an instrument of the Cold War and the containment policy suggested by George Kennan. In combination, the Marshall Plan and the policy of containment became the twin linchpins of US hegemony. (Keohane 1984/2004; Ruggie 1993; Patrick 2009). That hegemony involved providing international public goods, promoting the European Organization for Economic Cooperation as a new multilateral institution,

and applying the logic of power politics to the bipolar confrontation between the US and the USSR. Especially in the wake of Stalin's 1948 refusal to allow the participation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in the Marshall Plan, it became effectively impossible for US aid recipients to reject demands to join NATO.

We are not (not yet) in an era of bipolar confrontation, and there is no "Thucydides trap" between China and the West lurking around the corner (Allison 2017). But what still remains inspiring in this troubled time for a true hegemonic project is that the multilateral approach taken by the US after World War II managed to expand during and beyond the Cold War, thanks to both its links to global economic growth and the attractiveness of the "American way of life" as a form of soft power. Assuming that China is not seeking to use the BRI to pursue international hegemony as a single superpower, it will need to expand the nature of its international public goods provision, offer its autonomous partners opportunities for economic growth, enhance its soft power dimension, and foster shared interregional leadership within a revived multilateral network, in order to limit the impact of negative feedback and foil policies of containment by the US and other actors. The quality of its partnership with the EU³ and possible convergences both at the global and interregional levels are crucial. These are the key variables that may influence this potentially virtuous interregional scenario. Here, a triangular partnership among China, the EU, and Africa would be a relevant test.

The most daunting challenge facing a pluralist, multiple-style multilateralism is how to combine trade with other interregional issues, thereby linking external relations to internal policies. Traditionally, trade was a matter of technocratic, de-politicized global or interregional relations. However, this is changing dramatically, as a comparison of Chinese and EU approaches to foreign policy makes clear. Whereas the accent in China is on "multilateralism with Chinese characteristics" (19th CCP Congress, 2017), the EU strives to embody its own values in the making of foreign policy. In other words, the EU's cultural traditions extend even to its trade policy, which is a linkage that multiple modernities theory would lead us to expect. Of course, future post-hegemonic multilateralism will have to

³ "China Watch 2018" (published by Aspenia n. 82, 2018) focused on certain priorities in the EU's relationship with China; the parenthetical annotations are mine. (1) *Engagement* (which requires trust); (2) *reciprocity*, including FDI, trade and political reciprocity; (3) *security screening* (which is indispensable where China's FDI in strategic sectors of Europe is at stake); (4) *multilateralism* (which requires shared values to move forward); (5) *demands to the rule of law and to defend technological competitiveness*. In this context I would emphasize the interplay between China's foreign policies and its internal fragilities, including a huge public debt, delayed reforms, and the risk of economic crisis.

be based on pluralist convergence among very diverse approaches, political styles, background cultures, and divergent ways of making policy. That is why neglect of the multiple modernities principle has slowed progress in expanding multilateral trading relations. No country wants to buy another's values in addition to its commercial products.

According to the Treaty of Lisbon provisions, which went into effect in 2009, the EU attempted to create a comprehensive approach to foreign policy and a kind of single pillar of external relations. Legally framed by the Treaty of the EU (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), that approach obliges policymakers to promote human rights and sustainable development, among other general aims. EU Trade Commissioner Cecelia Malmstrom's 2015 paper, entitled "Trade for all", emphasized that "economic growth goes hand in hand with social justice, respect for human rights, high labor and environmental standards, and health and safety protection" (2015: 10). Finally, the "EU Global strategy" approved in 2016, following a proposal by the High Representative for Foreign Policy Federica Mogherini, commits the EU to "harmoniz[ing] trade arrangements not only with development goals but also with sustainable development, environmental protection, health, safety, human rights protection and foreign policy strategy".

This approach is counterbalanced by a strong emphasis on regional and interregional partnerships, in which the EU does not have to provide lessons to the partners. The previous Eurocentric and arrogant perspective of "normative power Europe" (Manners 2002) is largely over, and not only because it provoked negative feedback on every continent, as Acharya (2014) and other scholars have underlined.

What can be said about the impact of this controversial evolution? Between 2010 and 2018, the EU negotiated and signed a series of relevant "second generation trade arrangements" with interregional partners like S. Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Canada (De Block and Lebullinger 2018). Similar arrangements are under negotiation with MERCOSUR, Australia, and New Zealand. These complex and multipurpose interregional partnerships are politically relevant, notably in the Asia-Pacific region, because they address the huge vacuum created by the inward-looking and protectionist policy of Donald Trump. Although investments were located in the sphere of EU competence by the Lisbon Treaty, this competence was fine-tuned by the European Court of Justice in 2019, providing not only the EP but also the national parliaments with ratification power. For that reason, the difficulties involving several ongoing negotiations, including the Comprehensive Agreement on Investments (CAI) with China, are understandable. Is China likely to agree to seek some relevant improvements in respect for the rule of law in general and labor law in particular? Transparency and

fairness in business are the conditions for attracting foreign investments, increasing trade, building financial and economic partnerships. Consequently, they are among the goals of President Xi Jinping, as announced at the party congress of 2018. However, many problems exist that touch on the domestic impact of multilateral standards. For example, divergences in the notions of the rule of law and human rights have not yet been successfully addressed by the EU-China “human rights dialogue” (Ding *et al.* 2017). In addition, the question of labor rights is affecting the CAI agenda.

Could the EU simply forget about complying with its demanding treaty and strategy provisions? Doing so would not be easy, first because of the Lisbon Treaty provision that has altered the process through which trade policy acquires legitimacy. The treaty calls for enhanced democratic accountability and transparency by bestowing an oversight role on the EU parliament. Moreover, that body has the final word on ratification and, consequently, carries on a constant dialogue with very persistent NGOs. The Lisbon Treaty thus has changed the parameters and now requires closer cooperation among the Commission, the Council, and the Parliament. In effect, it integrates the Parliament into the established decision-making system. Furthermore, after the declaration by the Commission that some trade and investment arrangements such as CETA are “mixed treaties” that require the signatures of and ratification by both the EU and the member states, some of the latter have accepted and even supported the bottom-up politicization of EU trade policy. They have chosen to submit treaties to national and even sub-national (in the case of Belgium) majority decision-making. According to many observers, that procedure may undermine the credibility of the EU in international and interregional negotiations.

Is this more rigorous process on the part of the EU a sign of unilateral arrogance that will make beneficial trade deals harder to negotiate and less effective once they are? Or should the new system be considered a constructive factor, fostering higher standards in commercial arrangements, as it did in several instances, notably in the cases of Canada, Mexico, MERCOSUR, Japan, and Asia-Pacific? It is too early to answer this question.

6. THE BASIC CONDITIONS FOR A BOTTOM-UP RECONSTRUCTION OF A STRONGER MULTILATERALISM

One highly challenging implication of our research endeavor is that it will foster multiple convergences on a new multilateralist agenda between scholars coming from diverse cultural, national and regional context. However, there is a problem of common language and cultural dialogue that has to be addressed (Telò 2020a). We need to be precise about the evolving

nature of multilateralism in a context in which regionalism and interregionalism are expanding. What are the implications of regional identities and interregional cultural and trade dialogues for the theory and practice of the “new multilateralism”? And how can multilateralism contain power politics?

Classic references in the literature clearly articulate the two central ideas animating the post-war scheme of multilateral cooperation: “reciprocity” and the “general principle of conduct” (Ruggie and Caporaso 1993; Keohane 1984; Telò 2015). The issue that arises is whether those pillars suffice to sustain multilateralism in the 21st century. What can be said about efforts to deepen the features of the “new multilateralism” and about the role of regional organizations and interregional relations and dialogues within it?

Recent scholarship has opened up new avenues of research. Multilateral cooperation may decline because it is too inefficient and its legitimacy is too contingent. But it is also threatened by external factors such as the possible defection of its main stakeholder, the previously hegemonic USA, which weakens the system of multilayered governance. All of these drawbacks may mean that it will be impossible to cope with the emergence of power politics, fragmentation, and spheres of influence without upgrading the idea and practice of multilateral cooperation. A new multilateralism is on the agenda of relevant actors, from UN Secretary General António Guterres, to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, as well as many states and regional entities, and the epistemic community on every continent (Qin 2018; Acharya 2014; Telò 2015). Convergences and divergences are inevitable within what Katzenstein (Katzenstein 2005) calls “polyvalent globalism”. However, as Katzenstein goes on to argue, although “constrained diversity” may be a “constant” in international relations, it assumes a variety of institutional forms.

Because the quality of multilateralism is a function of the institutional order, the main issues on the agenda of a new multilateralism are of an institutional nature. The changing institutional framework is the independent variable shaping the possible movement of multiple and diverse modernities toward enhanced policy-convergence. Here, several key issues are at stake.

First: The new multilateralism can only be *post-hegemonic*. This means not only that the USA will be unable to stop its decline, but that neither the EU nor China is, or can be, a candidate to replace it. However, a post-hegemonic vacuum is dangerous for peace. Only a collective and cooperative leadership within stronger common institutions may ensure sustainable and fairer multilateral governance. Moving from the G7 to the G20 was a step in the right direction during the worst years of crisis (2008-10), even if recently the G20 has lost some of its relevance. Moreover, the US

under Trump is disengaging from traditional liberal multilateralism (Ikenberry and Deudney 2018). Does the end of US hegemony signal the end of the best aspects of the liberal idea of rules-based, transparent, and fair system of global governance beyond the state? This legacy has its roots in the Kantian institutional and legal pacifism. Could the Kantian idea be translated into the languages of modern regional and national cultures in India, China, and elsewhere? The new multilateralism is neither an arrogant nor a unanimous European demand. Europe is currently divided between (on the one hand) an elevated Habermasian, revised/regulated, post-American brand of liberalism and (on the other hand), illiberal tendencies driven by populist nationalist and protectionist parties. These nationalist strands of European politics are profoundly rooted in Europe's tragic history and political thought, from Carl Schmitt to Giovanni Gentile.

Second: The new multilateralism should enhance the relevance of fair, well-balanced *communicative action*, in two ways: via interregional partnerships and by containing asymmetries and recasting dynamics beyond all illusions about the EU as a single "normative power". Every power is a normative power. Norms are the consequences of various knowledge-backgrounds (Qin 2018) and of various cognitive priors (Acharya 2017). Multilateralism is essentially the antithesis of merely hierarchical international power relations. However, in a post-hegemonic context, the concept of "partnership" stands out, as emphasized by Qin Yaqing in his masterwork (Qin 2018) as well as in the large literature on "post-revisionist" interregional relations (Fawcett and Telò 2015). Scholars in this camp are engaged in the quest for a third way between Western-centrism and fragmented relativism (cf. Meyer and Sales Marques 2018). The main global actors need to usher in a third, multidimensional cultural era of interregional relations between equals, beyond universalism and relativism. In the case of the EU, that means going beyond both the Eurocentric period and the Euro skeptical one.⁴ The same of course holds true for the interregional

⁴ FAWCETT, TELÒ and PONJAERT (2015) identify three epochs of EU interregionalism and defines the features of a post-revisionist approach to interregional relations:

(A) EC/EU interregionalism started with the ACP program in 1957 and the Yaoundé and Lomé conventions as a consequence of the de-colonization process. However, after 1989-91 and the end of the bipolar world, the EU interregional relations became a distinctive feature of external relations at the global level. HETTNE (2007) and RÜLAND (2015) highlight both the differences and the competition between the EU-centered and the US-centered interregional partnerships: on the one hand, the US initiative towards "the emerging markets" (APEC, FTAA, the new transatlantic agenda) and, on the other, the EU initiative of the Rio process, the Cotonou convention and ASEM. The EU did feel then like a normative power (MANNERS 2002) exporting its model of regional integration.

relations launched by the EU, the USA, India, Brazil, South Africa, ASEAN, and China.

Third: The new multilateralism must be more *multilayered* than the version that prevailed in past decades: it should include the role of regional organizations and of interregional relations as crucial frames integrating partners within their respective continents as well as between the continents. It must move beyond Cordell Hull's 1945 vision of the UN, with its primary focus on the global level, as institutionalized in both the UN and the Bretton Woods agreement (1944) creating the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and, in 1947, General Agreement on Tariffs on Trade, and its commitment to global rules-based trade and financial multilateral cooperation. Former UN Secretaries General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan as well as several regional leaders from each continent argued that an authentic renewal would require a multilevel and regionalist reform of international organizations beyond the West-centric globalist model that proved successful in the aftermath of World War II. To cope with the challenges of nationalism and protectionism, multilateral forms of governance operating beyond the state must try to generate enhanced efficiency and legitimacy by building a set of regional and interregional pillars supporting connectivity, transnational ties, and regulation beyond the state.

Fourth: Multilateralism is becoming more "*institutionalized*", according to a broader understanding of that expression, as it evolves from informal fora, networks, and arrangements into intergovernmental consultative bodies and even true organizations. This inevitably means that multilateral cooperation becomes more intrusive and (whether *de facto* or *de jure*) more binding. In this new context, novel forms of interaction inside and outside

(B) There were some radical revisions at the end of the liberal peace period of the Nineties. The beginning of the new century saw a second period of rejection, linked to both internal EU problems, and the emergence of the BRICS. Both factors strengthened the partners' resistance against the importation of the EU model and spurred the search for new forms of regional and interregional relations. Rejection of EU normative power, alternative cognitive priors (ACHARYA 2009) and other factors explain this euro skeptical trend in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere.

(C) The current period is best understood as "post-revisionist," because for some years now the EU has been looking for a more modest and balanced approach to interregional relations. With few exceptions, the BRICS revealed their economic strengths and weaknesses as alternative models, while the post-crisis EU appeared to many observers as a still-relevant economic, commercial, and framing power, able to cope with the worst economic crisis of the postwar era and to revive interregional relations. Interregional relations appear most likely to respect the idea of "multiple modernities" (MEYER and DE SALES MARQUES 2018), which represents a third way between Western arrogance and relativism.

the state pose major political and cultural challenges, including for multidimensional interregional relations, as we can ascertain through comparative analysis of Europe and East-Asia and especially of the EU and China.

EU-Asia interregional relations have entered a critical phase. In light of Trump's new tariff policy and the uncertain future of NATO after the Brussels summit held in mid-July of 2018, the EU is sealing important deals with Japan, China and other relevant partners. These new agreements would complement the existing economic relations between the EU and other key Asian regional actors. The recent adoption of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) has set the stage for a more dynamic multipurpose partnership. At the same time, the 20th EU-China summit also focused on strengthening economic ties and overcoming the difficulties of the CAI. The Xi-Junker Joint Declaration of April 9th expressed the hope that CAI negotiations could be wrapped up in 2020, even if the Coronavirus epidemic disease will oblige to postpone the deadline.

In this context, the ASEM summit of October 18-19 2018 has been crucial to strengthening further multipurpose EU-Asia ties.⁵ How has the Europe-Asia Meeting developed so far as a soft interregional multilateral framework, and what can be achieved in coming years? And how does ASEM dovetail with domestic policy in the EU, China, and other powers such as India, Japan, and Indonesia?

The impact of such interregional cooperation on domestic politics and policies has increased in weight and complexity, as the examples of the EU and East Asia show, notably in the case of China. The inward-looking and protectionist trade policy and aggressive trade wars pursued by the United States have stimulated the EU to become a more proactive participant in reshaping global and interregional trade rules. However, it has evolved domestically in the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty. On one hand, it now has bestowed a veto power over trade deals upon the European Parliament and included trade within a single comprehensive approach to external relations, all to be based on EU values. On the other hand, the intrusion of

⁵ As noted above, the 12th ASEM summit took place in Ulaanbaatar on October 18, 2018 (the first one having been held in Bangkok in 1996) with 51 states participating, including 30 from Europe and 21 from Asia. Regional organizations from both sides also attended. Discussions focused on one controversial topic: "Europe and Asia: global partners for global challenges". Leaders did seek to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the two continents on a wide range of areas, including trade and investment, connectivity, sustainable development and climate, and security challenges such as terrorism, non-proliferation, cyber-security, and irregular migration. The ASEM summit was followed by the EU-Korea summit and the region-to-region EU-ASEAN leaders' meeting, convened on October 19. Not surprisingly, Europe is trying to diversify its economic and trade portfolio in light of Donald Trump's threats to impose tariffs on European goods and services.

national and subnational majoritarian politics as well as the pressure exerted by NGOs for transparency and value-consistency indicates a potential contradiction between external effectiveness and internal legitimacy. Why? Because the standard-setting established by the Treaty and the “Trade for All” strategy (2015) is a one-way street due to internal legitimacy and transparency requirements. That is, trade deals no longer can be signed by the EU unless they meet exacting internal requirements and legitimacy constraints.

FTA negotiations with India are deadlocked and will not be resumed as long as India sticks to its exceedingly low standards on environmental and social protection (making problem for the RCEP as well). Furthermore, the EU has a legal obligation to withdraw from negotiations for free trade when potential trading partners are found to violate EU values systematically, especially values involving sustainable development and human rights. This matters because values-based negotiations might rule out trade deals with certain countries, e.g., with Myanmar (in light of its persecution of Rohingyas) and Cambodia (where the government limits opposition rights). Yet, oddly enough, those values did not stop the EU from signing and ratifying a treaty with Vietnam and starting negotiations with ASEAN as a regional bloc that includes Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia. At the same time, the EU Commission has launched in 2019 a legal attack on South Korea for not implementing the bilateral clause of a trade arrangement that commits it to ratify ILO conventions.

This comprehensive approach may have an impact on the outcome of complex negotiations with China on the ‘Bilateral investment treaty’, in the event that the partner refuses to sign ILO conventions on labor rights. Of course the EU should exercise prudence and flexibility. If it truly followed a rigid “normative power” approach (Manners 2002), the EU could bargain only with Norway, Switzerland, and a few other countries in today’s world. That is why we need an intercultural dialogue on fundamental values. A serious intercultural dialogue at the level of civil societies would be extremely useful, especially if combined with trade and diplomatic negotiations. EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström said that “negotiations are more complex and difficult, but the current positive record in East Asia and South America says that they are possible”.⁶ Meanwhile, other trading actors like Canada likewise have upgraded their standards-requirements for trade negotiations.

For its part, China is drifting toward a serious dilemma. On the one hand, it has to defend the multilateral trade system from which it has ben-

⁶ Interview in Brussels Press House on October 16, 2018.

effitted so much since 2001. That would mean that it must implement consistent measures to respect the rule of law in domestic affairs and make its commitment to multilateral and interregional cooperation both sustainable and credible. On the other hand, the implications of multilateral cooperation in regard to respect for the rule of law may have troubling domestic consequences, such as pressure for internal reform, including adherence to labor standards such as the right of free association, the right to strike, and limited standards-setting. Yet all this would have to happen with no talk of human rights protections, since those are not yet included in the government's program as proclaimed by the CCP's innovative but rather "leftist" Congress of 2017.

The EU is not the only agent addressing the challenging question of how to institutionalize an enhanced and more "pluralist" form of government (whether softer or deeper) "beyond the state", both in trade and human rights realm. Other international actors such as the UN and WTO, individual states, transnational social movements, and regional organizations like ASEAN also are highlighting the need to strengthen the role of the international courts and to implement Kofi Annan's "responsibility to protect". Of course, that broad concept of responsibility may need revision after some controversial performances and in light of the proposal aired by the previous Brazilian government that the international community should assume "responsibility while protecting".

Fifth: Many scholars claim that the new multilateralism cannot avoid empowering a larger and deeper scheme of *citizens' participation*. That would mean greater input legitimacy bestowed by an enhanced role for civil society associations, actors, and networks. Such enhancement would have to begin during the negotiation process itself, i.e., before the multilateral arrangements were even made. Moreover, civil society groups would need to monitor the multilateral arrangements themselves and, relying on decentralized oversight and follow-up, try to ensure consistent implementation. All such modes of governance would naturally require full transparency and accountability. However, we are witnessing two conflicting tendencies in the current world: on the one side, enhanced nationalist and protectionist opposition to multilateralism, and, on the other, a variety of constructive cultural, economic, and political dialogues.

In almost every Western country, including (among many others) the US, the UK, Italy, Hungary, and Poland, plenty of evidence suggests that democratic participation and direct democracy (e.g., via social networks and referenda) are manipulated as powerful instruments of national populism: channels of irrational, inward-looking feelings and of nationalist and protectionist "mobilizations of fear", whether against "others",

against Europe, against migration, and in general against international cooperation, especially with China. Of course, populist parties have not had the same degree of electoral success in all the countries mentioned above, but the trend is clear. In short, populism is a form of extreme nationalism opposed to multilateral cooperation.

And yet it must be emphasized that multilateral and interregional institutions still matter, including interregional regimes and arrangements, as channels of information, communication, and cultural dialogue. Not only do they foster spillover effects and allow the reduction of transaction costs; they also encourage mutual cultural knowledge and people-to-people contacts that are fundamental for the future of interregional ties to expand beyond the Westphalian diplomatic legacy.

Several initiatives have been proposed that would move us in that direction, for example on the occasion of the 12th ASEM summit, held in 2018. For weeks in advance, that summit was preceded and followed by meetings of civil society networks.⁷ Similar trends are emerging in the EU-Latin American interregional partnership. The EU-Islamic intercultural dialogue in Istanbul and the EU's multiple interparliamentary dialogues with Mediterranean, Latin American, and Indian partners are headed in the same direction, even if their records are mixed and less impressive so far (cf. Jancic 2019).

This rich ongoing process of intercultural interaction is directly relevant to our theoretical discussion of multiple modernities and global governance. Is it a mere rhetorical exercise, subordinate to legitimacy imperatives, or is it a step in the right direction to cope with new domestic challenges and interregional cultural differences?

⁷ ASEM provides an excellent case study. European and Asian representatives of civil society-based, transnational networks discussed how to reinforce the interregional and multilateral system. The ASEM parliamentary meeting was hosted by the EP on September 28-29 of 2018 (see the Final Declaration of the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership meeting). The ASEM young leaders' summit focused on ethical leadership. Asian and European students, as well as young professionals, discussed leadership development over five days, from October 15-19, 2018. The Asia-Europe economic forum, focusing on monetary and housing policy, global climate change, international trade and Asia-Europe connectivity, was hosted by the think tank Bruegel in Brussels on October 17-18. The ASEM business forum, sponsored by *Business Europe* on October 18, 2018, discussed how to strengthen trade and investment relations between the two continents. The ASEM cultural festival took place in Brussels from October 18-30, displaying the creativity and cultural diversity of Asia and Europe through dance, film, music, theater, digital art, and the visual arts.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Interregional multipurpose dialogues are significant in many fields, including trade, economics, and politics. However, they cannot progress without a substantial upgrading, and without seriously addressing the respective background cultures and their profound differences. To cite just one case in which the background culture has an enormous impact on politics, we should consider China. There, the benefits of the Confucian legacy are not merely rhetorical; they are one of the country's strong points. Despite their disagreements, eminent Chinese scholars do agree on this, including Qin (2008), Yan (2011) and Zhao (2016), all of whom have argued eloquently for the continuing relevance of Confucianism in China (April 2018 national conference on international relations theory at CFAU University, Beijing).⁸ Turning to the European Union, we would encounter broad agreement that, at least on the continent and excluding the UK, the Enlightenment tradition still matters a great deal. The Kant thought – EU practice complex connection is essential even if, of course, not isolated. Christian, liberal and social democratic thought constitute some of the indispensable building blocks of the shared European background culture that supports peaceful, cooperative governance beyond the state and between the states (Telò and Weyenbergh 2020). However, for Europe, Kant matters in particular, since his was the first rational theory offering strong arguments on the linkage between the internal and external politics and legal orders, i.e., those inside and outside the state. In conclusion, thanks to the EU experience, the spread of democratic regionalism and interregionalism, the best culture of liberalism and a multilateral global governance may survive the declining US leadership and the complex challenges of the “gang of the four” mentioned at the beginning of this article. The single alternative is the Hobbesian jungle law.

Non-European thinkers demonstrate that precisely this postcolonial legacy explains the emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference in the post-colonial countries. Much the same point was made in the Bandung Declaration of 1955, in which leading figures of the day, including Sukarno, Nehru, and Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai, participated. However, more than 60 years later we are witnessing the failure of regionalism, whenever the sovereignty principle is pushed to extreme limits. At the same time, we must welcome the achievements that have been made in the construction of new kinds of multilateralism at the regional level, al-

⁸ With participation of B. Buzan, A. Acharya, P. Katzenstein, Qin Yan X. Zhao, M. Telò and other scholars, I thank here for substantive inputs.

though they remain timid and soft forms of governance beyond the state, as exemplified by ASEAN. We also know that the WTO panel system implies a form of law that supersedes that of its member states. That certainly provides a good example of governance beyond the state, much to dismay of the current US administration which is boycotting the panel system. Finally, in 2005 Kofi Annan inaugurated a new debate, arguing that it was impossible for the international community to remain indifferent to massacres occurring on a vast scale.

That is why we need to look for new, creative, pluralist theories of governance beyond the state, and identify the sources of thought and action that might implement such governance in the polymorphic international life of the 21st century. It therefore includes principles such as the free movement of people (not only of merchants but also of ordinary citizens who have a right to visit other countries, which must welcome them) as well as trade regulations intended to avoid hierarchies and colonialism. Consequently, not only democratic and republican states but also multiple transnational networks, people-to-people relations, and intercultural dialogue increasingly are becoming the driving forces behind peace-building. In other words, they are fostering the difficult combination of republicanism and federation. That combination would enable us, step by step and with Kantian prudence, to move beyond the traditional Westphalian paradigm towards an interregional/transnational institutionalized regime of peace.

Is this European “background knowledge” compatible with intercultural dialogue and “relational multilateralism”? Beyond traditional universalism we will need differentiated universalism as a bottom-up means to overcome the risk of relativism. As I see it, these should be topics for our research program. In any case, it is a matter of fact that the transnational dimension of the world polity plays a crucial role in sustaining interregionalism in several ways, notably by making it more efficient, more legitimate, and more able to frame balanced dialogue among cultures. Thinkers such as Habermas (2001), Bourdieu (1999), and Bobbio (1999), among others, have made it clear that this cathartic feature of European political culture marked a radical turning point against centuries of tragic conflicts and wars provoked by extreme nationalism during the first decades of the 20th century, the most violent period in European history. In the very moment at which movements have arisen that revive the pre-1945 specter, it is important to underline this feature of the European liberal political culture, one that is the very soul of European reconciliation and is open to intercultural dialogue.

The alternative would be the nightmare of a cultural and civilizational regression towards extreme nationalism, perhaps a kind of Huntingtonian clash between irreconcilable regions (Huntington 1996). Peaceful transna-

tionalism based on internal reconciliation is not the only tendency emerging from European societies in 2018, even if it has lasted for 70 years as a critical factor in promoting peace through socio-economic integration and governance beyond the state. As a consequence of the financial crisis that began in 2007-08, nationalism has returned in the form of populism, protectionism, and intolerance. It poses a threat to both domestic democracy and multilateral cooperation. What is new is that the populist rhetoric deploys democracy as a rhetorical weapon against three targets: openness, European integration, and interregional relations with other continents, notably with East Asia and China.

Let us conclude by returning to Kant and considering what he means by “cosmopolitanism”. He did not intend it to replace feelings of national belonging and patriotism by a vague global citizenship. On the contrary, civic republicanism includes patriotism as a background for international cooperation and enduring peace. But this delicate balancing of patriotic sentiment and cosmopolitanism will be realistic only on the assumption that international relations not only are paralleled but also legitimized by a variety of transnational ties combining civil society networks and building bridges between domestic “republicanism” and what Kant defines as interstate “federalism”. The latter differs profoundly from the inward-looking perspectives of Fichte and Rousseau, later replicated by Sun Yat-sen in China. On every continent, splendid examples of a combination between civic republicanism and institutionalized cooperation among states and cultures have emerged. Pan-Africanists such as Henry Sylvester Williams, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Kofi Annan (Yusuf 2014) and liberal Pan-Americanists like Simón Bolívar have much to add concerning the synthesis between patriotism, freedom, and regional cooperation. This innovative way forward might lead to a confidence-building process, a trust-building dialogue, while gradually allowing governance beyond the state to be transformed from an instrumental into a binding process. This gradual revision of the traditional Westphalian paradigm is already underway and should be inspired more and more by Mahatma Gandhi’s advice: “Relationships are based on four principles: respect, understanding, acceptance, and appreciation”.

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