

Stevo Pendarovski:

Replacing European Union: Eastern Alternatives Awaiting?

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Abstract

Protracted crisis in the European Union has substantially augmented lingering euro-skepticism on the continent. Member-countries are desperate to restore the legitimacy of the organization, while descending perceptions about values of the EU integration model among candidates and would be members are real. Inward-looking EU is less engaged in imposing conditionality which has been for more than a decade a main instrument in exporting democracy. With the EU gravitational effects largely absent, nationalistic and populist sentiments are gaining ground in some parts of the Western Balkans, advocating alternatives to European integration as a regional gate to globalization. What does the past record of several Eurasian regional organizations imply about their potential to serve as sustainable alternatives to the European Union? Can the regional trends in the wider Euro-Asian area eventually open up alternative perspectives for some of the Western Balkan countries trailing back on their European path? In this article, the performances of a few regional organizations in Eurasia in several domains will be analyzed applying the comparative method. The aim of the paper is to depict a different genesis and civilizational background and emphasize structural flaws and comparative weaknesses of these organizations to the European Union, especially in the area of political and cultural values underpinning their engagement.

Keywords: Crisis, euroscepticism, alternative regional organizations, political values

Introduction

What began in 2008 as a sovereign debt crisis three years later translated itself into the profound crisis of public confidence in economy, in politicians and in the European project as a whole (Stokes, 2012). What is making the overall setting even more complicated is that the mid-term euro-crisis coincides with the structural, longer term tendencies of Europe's relative decline and these two sides of the coin are only reinforcing each other. Especially worrying is skepticism signifying partial "emotional detachment" stemming not so much by the meager economic benefits of integration, but, more by the lack of "fit" between the Union and a person's identity (Sorensen, 2006).

Although in some parts of Europe there are expectations that in due time the organization will restore its legitimacy, the underlying contradictions of the European enterprise will likely prevent deeper political integrations and making the Union as envisaged in Maastricht or Lisbon (Friedman, 2012). Beyond doubt, the European Union still counts in global affairs, but, its downward trajectories in the military domain, economy, energy dependence and demographics are unlikely to be dramatically reversed in the foreseeable future (Youngs, 2011). However, an important bright spot does exist in the otherwise gloomy scenery: deep financial and economic distresses in the EU have not undermined belief of EU citizens in political and cultural pillars of their organization. A sound majority of them still remain committed to the market economy and democratic norms (Stokes, 2012). In terms of legitimacy, the amount of support for EU institutions is low across the member countries, but, the Union anyhow fares much better than some other models of regional governance when judged against the respective national discourses (Schneider & Hurelmann, 2011).

In the same period in the Western Balkans European integrations have been pressurized by at least two processes approaching from opposite directions: infighting in Brussels has undermined attractiveness of the project and increased enlargement fatigue among the members, while bilateral disputes between the local nations, such as the Greek blockade of Macedonia's bid for NATO membership due to a dispute over the latter's name, are holding some of them back for years. It is reasonable to expect that after the integration of Croatia no country from the region will enter the European Union until 2020. In an atmosphere of rising mutual suspicion

between Brussels and Balkans it has not been a surprise to hear political proposals going outside of the parameters of the traditional integration rhetoric. In Macedonia formal and informal advisors to the politicians in power have publicly hinted on leaving Euro-Atlantic integrations, while in Serbia the Interior Minister on several occasions has suggested the same in the context of their dispute with Kosovo. Local experts and politicians have been publicly juggling with two options: political neutrality and more often, rapprochement towards allegedly more functional and vibrant regional organizations in Eurasia.

Therefore, in the next chapters some of the current forms of Eurasian regionalism will be examined with special focus on China and Russia as the most powerful entities able to initiate, participate and navigate almost all relevant undertakings in that part of the world. Within our subject of analyses answers to two outstanding questions will mostly shape the debate and conclusions at the end: first, what does the inner political logic of the most influential regional players suggest about the forms and substance of the regional organizations they are a part of and second, what does the comparative regionalism have to say about the past achievements and future prospects of regional cooperation in Eurasia? Before that, a brief paragraph about the potentials of Euroscepticism as a playing field for all debates on the European future that will ensue.

Endurance of Euroscepticism

Recent records of almost all European post-communist countries confirms that the level of enthusiasm for EU integration was at its highest in the first years after the political and ideological changes of 1989. Rather strange at the time, but, the public in the former communist countries had overwhelmingly been supportive of the processes of integration despite the substantial lack of knowledge about the basics of the phenomenon and practical absence of debates about benefits and pitfalls stemming from it. In this regard accurate accounts have been offered by Riishoj who writes about the uninformed enthusiasm (2004), and Drulak on the consensus-making without debate (2001). However, as the candidate-countries have been nearing the Union awareness among the citizens and politicians alike about the complexity and challenges of the overall endeavor have been gradually emerging on the surface.

Ten years ago Taggart и Szczerbiak published relevant research on Euroscepticism (2002), analyzing party politics on the subject in the EU member countries and candidates for membership. Their proposed dichotomy of hard and soft Euroscepticism still holds despite notorious methodological difficulties in defining the term and specific influence over it of more than twenty different political contexts on the continent. Within their framework, hard Euroscepticism is principled opposition to the project of a United Europe, as such, exercised by the parties who urge their countries to withdraw from membership, while soft Euroscepticism is rejection of specific EU policies wherever the perception persists that national interest and trajectory of integrations are passing each other. Key findings from the Taggart and Szczerbiak study confirmed that in virtually all EU members and candidates political manifestations of Euroscepticism were alive well before Eastern enlargement. Although a decade ago most of them had been only randomly present and classified within the group of soft Eurosceptics, they had already been established as part of the European political discourse. However, political decision-making in the states in the aforementioned period was relatively relaxed due to the fact that the amount of citizens' Euroscepticism had not been substantially transferred into the support for the Eurosceptic political parties.

For a long stint, one central feature of Euroscepticism had been its informal affiliation with the populist and anti-elitist platforms on the continent. Rationale behind their position was easily observable: since its inception European integrations were widely conceived as a project of the European elites, so the ensuing populist criticism of it and the "anti-establishment" mobilization was a logical outcome (Taggart, 1995). However, a decade later in the unexpected twist of history citizens and elites find themselves on the same side of politics. A sequence of polls conducted by Eurobarometer in the period 1981-1999 found that on average between 8% and 17% of EU citizens have been firm that EU membership is not a "good thing" for their country. In mid-2007, 57% of EU citizens thought that the EU membership had been beneficial for their country, but, in mid-2011 only 47% supported the same view in a Eurobarometer poll (Stokes: 5). In the meantime, the European political elites have not indicated at all that they are ready to challenge the popular tide.

Russia and Eurasian Regionalism

In the last two decades there have been various efforts to institutionalize regional groupings on the Eurasian continent from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) up to the latest attempts to reinvigorate the Eurasian Economic Community and behind many of them stood Russia. A Commonwealth of Independent States from Moscow's perspective has two rationales for emerging: maintaining the energy complex as unified as it was in the fallen federation and preserving "interstate community of belonging" with the new democracies many of which had never existed before the USSR. However, because of the political disagreements between Russia and other members, CIS has remained, in the words of Molchanov, in the zone of "rhetorical regionalism". By the end of 2004, more than a decade after its inception CIS had adopted more than 1400 documents in total, but, virtually none had been implemented in its entirety (Molchanov; 2011). Instead of politico-military union with at least coordinated trade, monetary and economic policies, the CIS of today is nothing more than a consultative forum. The announced common ruble zone never materialized, the status of Russian troops deployed abroad is negotiated on a bilateral basis instead of being agreed upon within the multilateral framework.

The most ambitious grouping in Euro-Asia, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) established in 2001 is a successor of the so-called "Shanghai 5" brought into being five years earlier for mainly managing border security. The organization has linked two Eurasian giants - Russia and China with a group of secularized Central Asian nations - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and officially proclaimed peace, security, stability and economic development as its chief objectives. Today its activities span from countering terrorism, drugs and trafficking in persons, to joint military exercises and cooperation in education, economy, trade and finance with energy cooperation at the top of the agenda (Molchanov, 2011). Regarding the nature and real ambitions of the SCO, at least two schools of thought exists in the West: the first is classifying it as essentially an anti-western alliance and gathering of semi-authoritarian regimes additionally confirmed by the fact that they have rejected USA's bid to be an observer in the organization. And the second group of authors argue that despite holding serious objections about the features of the globally dominant neoliberal-type of globalization, members of SCO are equally interested in "mutually

beneficial" cooperation with the leading Western nations (Molchanov; 2009). For both Moscow and Beijing apart from other arguments the organization is important for being the platform for harmonizing Sino-Russian relations without the presence of Western powers (Balcer & Petrov; 2012). Motives of other local nations for engagement in SCO though not stated are visible: neither Moscow nor Beijing are using conditionality which is the key instrument regularly applied by the EU for democratic transformation of the applicants before accession. Until now, no meaningful level of cooperation had been recorded between SCO and any of the European countries for obvious reasons: disparate political and cultural matrices and a lack of a common denominator which should be respected by both sides as a basis for durable partnership.

The Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) is an old project whose facilitation was not possible in the early 1990-ties since its economic logic was pushed back by the regional security threats after the collapse of the communist empire. The EurAsEC was planned to be a tightly connected economic organization that would eventually lead to a single economic space (Molchanov, n.d.). However, the idea which initially envisaged covering nearly 40% of the total area of the Eurasian continent never penetrated outside of the former Soviet space and has not even been endorsed by two thirds of the former Soviets republics, suspicious of the eventual political components of the concept. In essence, Kremlin's vision for EurAsEC was (and still is) just another attempt for post-Soviet reintegration centered on the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. It seems that the undeclared target of the organization is more to clash than to be complementary with the EU's foreign relations instrument - European Neighborhood Policy (Judah, Kobzova, & Popesku).

Moscow's vs. Brussels's Regionalism: Alternative or Modified Western Model

In the past decade the regime in Moscow started to increasingly define itself against the West; by overemphasizing the concept of "sovereign democracy" Russia is firmly pursuing autonomous development (Judah, Kobzova, & Popesku, 2011, p. 17). Pragmatic political reasons, but, historic experience as well, has contributed significantly to the Russian ambivalence towards the Western Alliances. Although influences of modernization have

been coming for centuries from the West perceptions of the ordinary people and the political elite in Moscow is that exactly the same side of the world is producing the biggest threats for the Russian state. According to the recent polls more than a half of the Russians believe that their country's relations with the leading European states will never be truly friendly (Balcer & Petrov; 2012). According to some observers, the Joint Statement on the Partnership for Modernization, issued at the end of the EU-Russia Summit two years ago is the most recent evidence of different political templates supported by both sides. While the main goal for Brussels through this document is to change, if possible, the Russian "discourse on modernization", for Moscow it means only importing Western technology and investments without executing meaningful institutional and structural reforms (Ibid).

The European Union during the last 20 years has been intermittently stabilizing or transforming the former communist states by exporting its norms and principles of good governance. From the Velvet Revolutions in 1989-1991 to the Color Revolutions a decade and a half later it appeared that the neighboring countries (including Russia) have been attracted by the democratic practices of the European Union (Johansson-Nogues; 2011). But, what is happening nowadays with the so called "automatic attraction" of the EU in the light of its latest deep financial and economic challenges, especially concerning the Russian Federation? Since the official opening of the bilateral relations between Moscow and Brussels, Russian people have been mostly supportive of political models coming from the West. At its peak in 1991 approximately 70% of Russians supported liberal democracy and market economy, but, the Russian favorable view of the EU persisted well into the 2000s (Shevtsova, 2011). However, in the period after the Kosovo War and coming to power of the new political leadership, the Kremlin has started to outline new political frameworks with the so-called "Russia-first" argument on the top. If 35% of Russians surveyed in 2000 declared that Western values and culture are destructive for their country, ten years later 57% were firm that the West/EU seeks to undermine Russia. Approximately in the same span of time the number of Russians who do not regard themselves as Europeans and sharing the same liberal values rose from 48% to 71%. And the most intriguing fact exposed by the recent surveys: 72% of the citizens replied that they "prefer order to democracy" (Johansson-Nogues, 2011, p. 15).

Having said that, an objective observer cannot ameliorate or justify mistakes done by the "other side". It is true that in the meantime instead of

being a defender and promoter of norms and values the EU has often produced dissonant views or maintained double track behavior which has ultimately undermined its moral authority and legitimacy. Nevertheless, it is a fact that since the fall of communism Russia has never risen above its own transitional problems and produced attractive political and economic models to be followed by its neighbors or the rest of the world. It is safe to say that in the long run Moscow will make a strategic mistake if it drifts apart from Europe since the western part of the continent beyond a doubt can offer valuable instances of modernization and successful transition from communism to democracy. Former communist states, now in the EU according to the relevant economic and democratic benchmarks are faring much better measures against all the others who have not been through the processes of conditionality and Europeanization. The western Balkan countries and Turkey, also, have made substantial progress since the EU recognized them as the potential candidates in 1999 and 2000 according to the various indicators on democratic credentials of the institutions from Freedom House to the World Bank (Borzel & Van Hullen, 2011). Instead of marching in step with the most advanced countries in the world Russia in the meantime has declined on indexes that project corruption, property rights and competitiveness. Experts consider that problems had been augmented by the huge capital flight from Russia, while the national authorities estimated that 1.25 million people have left the country in the last few years only (Judah, Kobzova & Popesku). Flexing muscles internationally has not helped Moscow even in the area of economy since the EU in the last decade has overtaken Russia as the main trading partner of the countries covered by the so-called "Eastern Partnership" (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) with the exception of Belarus.

At the same time despite Moscow's declarations of allegedly keeping equal distance to other poles of global power, an important political rapprochement between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China has taken place. When analyzing mutual support of Russia and China in the last decade clear strategic rationale from the arsenal of real politics is appearing on the surface. At the threshold of the century the crucial document, the Beijing Declaration, paved the way for an emerging strategic alliance structured on the platform of "defying hegemonism" (Beijing Declaration, 1999). Since that period, two countries established forums that have routinely excluded the West, such as the BRIC and Shanghai

Cooperation Organization, while in the meantime an unofficial “veto coalition” performed almost uninterrupted in the United Nations (Judah, Kobzova & Popesku; 2011). However, regardless of the political rhetoric, overall it looks like an uneasy partnership in which both sides strictly pursue their own national interests. The fact is that the economic relations are growing, but, they are increasingly imbalanced in China’s favor: in 2010 Russia counts for only 2% of China’s imports and bought only 1.9% of its exports. China has penetrated into the traditional Russian gas monopoly in Central Asia, while Russian arms exports to Beijing have been slashed down from 60% of the Moscow’s total export in 2005 to meager 6.7% in 2010.

Moscow, but Beijing and other regional capitals as well, have found one common denominator and several distinctive motives for their positioning towards the regional organizations. Defensive reaction against western-style globalization was the common ground for collective efforts, but China’s economic penetration in the region, Eastern enlargement of the European Union and Russia’s attempts to reassert itself in its “near abroad” figured prominently on the national list of priorities (Molchanov; 2009).

Asian Integration Paradigm

A sizable amount of literature on Asian regional cooperation has been predominantly focused on East Asia, and much less on other Asian regions, but there is still no consensus on the definition or features of Asian regionalism (Soderbaum; 2008). Regional institution-building in Asia according to some views is a clear example of tensions between western-centric and autonomous regional models of cooperation. Even the early proposals for global multilateralism which envisaged connecting most of the vast Eurasian land, such as the model initiated by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in the 1970-ties and later met with considerable opposition by China and other influential Asian nations (Acharya, 1997). To a certain extent, the Asia-Pacific region after the Second World War has not been explicitly open to multilateral institutions because of the undisputed hegemony of the United States of America over much of the bipolar world and after. Nevertheless, a much stronger reason has been the intention of regional nations to adapt and internalize universal principles of multilateralism in line with their specific political systems, cultural heritage and historical experience.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) study suggests that it is highly unlikely for the Asian countries to cope effectively with the challenges of globalization relying on the market forces and national undertakings alone. According to the ADB's findings, future transformations will ask for norms, rules, common vision and regional organizations to coordinate governments' actions. This huge region hardly needs new regional institutions since at present there is a total of 40 (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Some of them are overarching, umbrella organizations, others are geographically or functionally oriented for dealing with specific issues and areas. However, the prime goal for the existing organizations to be more effective is more power and competences to be assigned to them by the governments in the region. Precisely at this point lays the crucial Asian dilemma: it does not seem that local elites are ready to surrender parts of their national sovereignty to regional bodies.

Since its foundation in 1967 the preeminent Asian regional institution ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) has been the bearer of all the essential trademarks of the so-called "ASEAN way" of regional cooperation. Four principles employed by the organization, deserve particular attention because they are giving distinctive character to this regional model of institution-building: open regionalism, cooperative security, "soft" regionalism and consensus (Acharya; 1997). ASEAN has not accepted the idea of centralized bureaucracy with decision-making authority. Since its beginnings the organization has developed a flexible framework of coordination undertaken by the national Governments without delegating sovereignty to a regional authority. "Soft" regionalism in the Asian context means "preference for evolutionary, non-legalistic methods and non-binding commitments". In Acharya's words virtually all Asian nations insist on a non-threatening atmosphere as more prone for problem-solving. Even China's "peaceful rise" preoccupying the world in the past two decades has never been described by them as a threat. In a similar discourse the nation of "confidence building" as allegedly more appropriate for describing "relationship among adversaries" not among the partners is dismissed (Ibid, pp. 334 - 336). Regional political arrangements always tend to center on negotiations among governments framed in a manner that does not endanger sovereign prerogatives in any way (ADP, 2010).

Establishment of multilateral institutions in the Asia-Pacific is an interest-driven process, but, identity-driven as well, involving ideas, regional cultural norms and a quest for a collective regional identity. This identity-

building is conditioned as much by historical, cultural and political self-perceptions as by the neo-liberal logic of the market-led integrations. On the continent ASEAN is widely considered an organization which is leading the way towards more institutionalized regional integration. Its members in 1992 committed themselves to the creation of a free trade area, adopted a Charter in 2008 and publicly endorsed the objective for creating the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. The Charter established regional human rights and envisaged a rule-based community, especially in trade, finance and environmental areas. Nevertheless, the traditional "ASEAN way" involving cooperation through informal understanding is still firmly dominated by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the members. The whole project is weakly institutionalized even including the "ASEAN plus 3" format where ten ASEAN members cooperate with the global economic powerhouses like China, Japan and South Korea.

Asian regional organizations have always been inclined toward adopting the so-called "convoy membership practices" – inclusive institutions open to a large membership virtually without preconditions. Such practices are generally contrary to the process of adopting the EU' *acquis communautaire* by the EU candidates (ADB; 2010). Decades long ASEAN gradual enlargement from 5 to 10 members was not based on previously declared objective criteria. However, deeper regional integration might require more standing organs and a secretariat with proportions similar to the one facilitating the activities of the European Commission in Brussels with an operating budget of 3 billion Euros annually. Therefore, the next big dilemma about the ways to improve efficiency of regional architecture will be how to define membership and compliance rules which is unusual in a region attached to the traditional notions on sovereignty.

ASEAN Way vs. European Way

One explanation of rationalists on the logic of regional cooperation concentrates on the economy and expected material gains from such transactions. However, their discourse is less convincing when explaining the lack of regional institutions in the parts of the world where the countries are engaged in the intense mutual economic cooperation like China, Japan and South Korea. In this regard, helpful contribution is coming from the constructivists' camp who argue that basic prerequisites for successful

integration are "sense of community" and higher "cultural affinity" among the respective nations (Borzal, 2011, pp. 4-21). Some authors are going even further by stressing significance of the shared political values among the participating states (Behr & Jokela, 2011). Although a complex and multidimensional phenomenon is able to single out four key elements in most of the regional projects: common geography, regular interactions on political and economic levels, shared regional perception, and outside recognition. Among the drivers of regional cooperation and integration, the socio-cultural values are the critical ones that could lead towards "cognitive regionalism" based on "shared linguistic, religious, historical and emotional affiliations" (Ibid., p. 14).

Eurasian regionalism has at least three areas in common: economy, security and opposition to the Western ideas of democracy-promotion and is developing quite differently from the European integrations - without foundational treaties or supra-territorial institutions or regimes. These are likely the prime reasons for the absence of substance and direction of regionalization processes in Eurasia (Molchanov; 2011) where local nations are unable to share common strategic vision and understanding of what makes their region distinct from its wider neighborhood. Different and at times competing national interests and concerns about Russian or Chinese domination in the region have produced uneven patterns of cooperation. In fact, the mode of Eurasian regionalism reflects key difference between Moscow security-driven and Beijing economy-driven models of integration. For some authors, the slow pace of regionalization in Eurasia is due to the lack of the local "engine", a state or states that would be able and willing to navigate integrations politically. Practically all members revolve around the concept that models of political and social development should not be exported to other countries nor imported from the outside.

More generally speaking among the new and old regional powers with global ambitions no country is willing to support promotion of democracy outside of their borders in line with the long-standing Western practices. Virtually all of them, including Russia and China in the first place remain leading exponents of the pro-sovereignty, anti-interventionist approach to international politics (Carothers & Youngs; 2011).

Within the field of comparative regionalism two tendencies are remarkable about the relations between European and other regionalisms in the world. First, the perspective dubbed as Europe-centered, strongly

emphasizes values of the EU model and consider it as a reference point of each comparison in the field. The second approach reject the European experience as a general point of departure and instead emphasizes regional specifics and positions that each regionalism is a sui generis case (Soderbaum, 2011).

Many Asian policymakers dislike the notion that Asian regionalism is inferior compared to the European one. Some of them would eventually accept that the EU might be an inspiration, but, reject the thesis that Europe should provide a model for Asian cooperation (Acharya, 2008). One author opines that differences between Asia and Europe in this regard are shaped by four groups of reasons: history, foundational objectives, domestic political structures and security relations with external powers. First of all, Europeans are connected by a common religious and cultural traditions and collective problem-solving mechanisms which dated back as far as the early 19th century. To the contrary, Asia is much more culturally diverse with a poorer record in multilateral practices. Second, United Europe was made and transfer of sovereignty agreed in order to prevent another world war, while in Asia by promoting regionalism national elites of post-colonial countries have been eager to fully preserve sovereignty not to transfer it. Third, Western European states are politically and economically stabilized and it looks practically irreversible while Asian states have visible shortcomings in achieving political and social cohesion and the rule of law which prevent them from making more credible commitments to international cooperation. Finally, a pattern of regional security arrangements is different in two regions: in Europe despite the military preeminence of the United States *de jure* there exists multilateral military alliance, while in Asia is established the so-called "hub and spoke" system within which the US is bilaterally connected with several regional allies. As notified by Acharya, there is no presence of NATO in Asia and no regional organization is aspiring to assume either the role of the EU or the OSCE in election monitoring and democracy promotion. Despite the provisions in the ASEAN Charter there is still no effective regional human rights mechanism in place with a capacity to enforce its own decisions.

Despite occasional denials by the Asian politicians several EU ventures have already been emulated by them as a useful guide for internal organization and practical cooperation among the ASEAN members. For example, the organization has adopted a Constitution-like Charter in 2007, introduced an ASEAN Troika consisted of the former, current and future Head

of the Council of Ministers and recently established a dispute settlement mechanism. Members are commonly referring to the “three pillars” of the organization and have publicly announced their goal of establishing an Economic Community (Jetschke; 2010).

Conclusion

Beyond doubt, the current EU crisis is widening the political gap between its members and some authors are even alleging the “European clash of civilizations”. Within the suggested framework, the so-called Germanic bloc insists on austerity and rules, Latin bloc wants growth, while an Anglo-Saxon nations would like to relax connections with the Union (Leonard, 2011). However, no one among the relevant political subjects within the EU is mentioning alternative regional organizations or extra-European models of cooperation as a way out of the depressing situation. Even among the Nordic countries traditionally known as “reluctant Europeans” (Smoor; 2006, p. 43) no country has been looking for alternatives, including Norway which is not an EU member, but, for decades, de facto is behaving as one.

According to the latest Ernst and Young European survey the EU remains the world's largest regional destination for FDI with a quarter of all global investment landing within its borders (2011). Within the polycentric world the EU share of global FDI is slightly decreasing, but its attractiveness as a business destination remains strong. An important fact for the Balkan countries is that Central and Eastern Europe are positioned in the third place as the world's most attractive investment regions behind China and Western Europe. Last, but not the least important, Gallup's Potential Migration Index predicts that populations in some wealthy nations could see substantial growth due to the migration from the poorest countries and regions in the world. The very fact that on the chart of twenty of the most desired destinations by the migrants worldwide ten are members of the European Union (Esipova, 2010) speaks volumes about its preserved level of attractiveness despite the unprecedented scope of economic and financial turmoil on the continent.

As presented by some authors (Warleigh & Rosamond, 2011) studies of comparative regionalism should not condone bypassing the “most advanced instance” of regionalism in world politics – European regionalism. According to Borzel in virtually all vital areas: economy, political and security

cooperation, common administration and adjudication, decision-making and policy implementation, the European Union is far ahead compared to any other regional organization in Asia, Africa, South and North America (Borzel, 2011).

According to some comparative analyses, despite visible dynamism in recent years rigid focus on intergovernmental cooperation and principles of non-interference in the internal affairs has largely diminished prospects for deeper integration in Asia. Important contemporary issues such as human rights, environmental protection or labor standards are rarely or never tackled by regional organizations all of which lack supranational mandate. Security cooperation is mainly in the initial stages, complex border disputes and regional rivalries persist, a single market for goods and services does not exist. Described specifics of Asian regionalism leave extremely narrow maneuvering space for any European country to be eventually involved in the non-economic dimensions of Asian regionalism, let alone embraced by the organizations born and managed in a very different socio-cultural milieu.

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