EU as a Global Actor: An Anatomy of Actorship

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Abstract

In comparing the external actions of a region and a nation state it is important to address a primary distinction, namely that while for instance the US and China operate as territorial states, the EU is a different kind of political animal: a regional institutionalized polity. The question is how such a polity can be an actor in world politics. Is such ‘regional agency’ merely a European or a more general, even systemic phenomenon? Regional agency is a new and underresearched phenomenon, which has come to life due to the transformation of the EU from being mainly an instrument for economic cooperation to being a political actor trying to shape external conditions. It is argued that the need for regional agency comes from the challenges of globalization as most states are too weak to manage these problems on their own. But the ability must be created from inside through innovative institution building. The question is what the preconditions for this ability might be and to what extent it really happens, or may happen, in other regions than Europe. The preconditions must be looked for both in internal developments within the region and in its external context. The relative cohesion of the regional actor shapes external action, which in turn impacts on regional identity and consciousness through the expectations and reactions of external actors vis-à-vis the region. This paper gives an outline of European regionalism and regional agency as a process in which internal and external factors interrelate. The paper deals, firstly, with the issue of actorship: the mutually supportive relationship between regionness, presence and actorness, providing the theoretical framework for the analysis. Secondly, it outlines the historical development of a European actor: the formation of a European regional international system and a European identity through processes of convergence and policies of cohesion. Thirdly, it describes the intricate machinery through which actorness is being institutionalized, what is here referred to as the European Foreign Policy Complex (EFPC) and how this complex operates in its various European Foreign Policy Relations (EFPRs) in trying to achieve consistency and coherence.

Introduction

In comparing the external actions of a region and a nation state it is important to address a primary distinction, namely that while for instance the US and China operate as territorial states, the EU is a different kind of political animal: a regional institutionalized polity. The question is how such a polity can be an actor in world politics. Is such ‘regional agency’ merely a European or a more general, even systemic phenomenon? Regional agency is a new and underresearched phenomenon, which has come to life due to the transformation of the EU from being mainly an instrument for economic cooperation to being a political actor trying to shape external conditions. It is argued that the need for regional agency comes from the challenges of globalization (including environmental problems) as most states are too weak to manage these problems on their own. But the ability must be created from inside through innovative
institution building. The preconditions must be looked for both in internal developments within the region and in its external context. The relative cohesion of the regional actor shapes external action, which in turn impacts on regional identity and consciousness through the expectations and reactions of external actors vis-à-vis the region. This paper gives a comparative outline of European regionalism and regional agency as a process in which internal and external factors interrelate.

As a summary concept for ability to influence the external world I use actorship. The concept of actorship is to include subjective, institutional, historical and structural dimensions in order to give a comprehensive view on regional agency as distinct from state action. A multidimensional approach to the study of regionally based actorship is built around three interacting components: internal (objective) integration and (subjective) identity formation, or regionness, international presence in terms of size, economic strength, military power etcetera, and capacity to act purposively to shape outcomes in the external world, or actorness. External action thus depends on internal cohesiveness, which includes identity as an important but hard-to-define component. Identity is what brings people together to becoming a ‘we’. There are many historical sources claimed to have created a European identity. However, they differ in importance for different parts of Europe—most of them being rather feeble in its northern parts—and it can be debated to which degree they play a significant role for the present generation of Europeans. Identity is not simply based on tradition, and tradition is not always reproduced in a simple way. Rather identity is being continuously recreated by new experiences and challenges for an enlargening population of ‘Europeans’, which to various extents are becoming rather than being Europeans.

If there is a consolidated internal actor identity, there should also follow some sort of external actorship, having more or less impact in different places and issue areas. This impact depends on the strength of regionness, presence and actorness in various policy areas and in relation to various counterparts. The question is to what extent the EU’s strong international presence is actually transformed to a purposive capacity to shape the external environment by influencing other actors and ultimately world order. It is argued that the very meaning of ‘Europe’ is in fact the non-existence of a clear borderline between internal and external. Europe is trying to shape world order by means of inclusiveness, by treating the external as if it were internal, a political innovation which marks a significant departure from traditional realist power politics (which by the way was also born in Europe). Historically, we can identify a long and complicated process in which increasing regionness is translated to presence, which in turn provides the basis for actorness, that is external impact through better and more purposeful organization. Most would consider this a process sui generis, but we shall nevertheless, and in spite of many warnings against eurocentrism, try to identify some international parallels.

The paper deals, firstly, with the issue of actorship: the mutually supportive relationship between regionness, presence and actorness, providing the theoretical framework for the analysis. Secondly, it outlines the historical development of a European actor: the formation of a European regional international system and a European identity through processes of convergence and policies of cohesion. Thirdly, it describes the intricate machinery through which actorness is being institutionalized, what is here referred to as the European Foreign Policy Complex (EFPC) and how this complex operates in its various European Foreign Policy Relations (EFPRs) in trying to achieve consistency and coherence.
1. Dimensions of regional actorship

Actorship for a region does not normally imply a legal personality of the type characterizing nation-states. The question raised here is whether macro-regions or world regions can assume properties and qualities similar to larger nation-states, namely to pursue coordinated, coherent and consistent policies towards the outside world, while having a significant impact on the external environment and the behaviour of other actors. This potential depends primarily upon our definition of region. Normally a region is not associated with actorship but rather is seen as an “arena” or “level” of action. Not so here. Regions are here understood as processes; they are not geographical or administrative objects but potential subjects, and thereby actors in the making (or un-making); their boundaries are shifting, and so is their capacity as actors in different issue areas as well as geographical areas.

A region exhibits a similarity to a nation, in that even a region is an “imagined community”, and like a nation it has a territorial base. But there are also differences, for instance the variety of interests and the problem of coordination in a foreign policy complex like the one formed by the EU. Actorship for a region is thus a complex phenomenon consisting of three dimensions: regionness, presence and actorness. An increase in the level of regionness leads to a more distinct presence, which in turn actualizes the question of actorness, due to the need to respond to expectations flowing from various forms of presence.

1. Regionness

Regionalism is usually seen as the ideology and project of region-building, while the concept of regionalization is reserved for more spontaneous processes of region formation by different actors – state or non-state. When different processes of regionalization in various fields and at various levels of society intensify and converge within the same geographical area, the cohesion and thereby the distinctiveness of the region in the making increases. A regional actor takes shape. This process of regionalization can be described in terms of levels of regionness (Hettne 1993, 2003; Hettne and Söderbaum 2003). Increasing regionness normally implies that a geographical area is transformed from a passive object (an arena or a strategic theatre) to an active subject—an actor—increasingly capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region. It may be more accurate to refer to the articulation of transnational interests in the region, since in reality the various more or less particularistic interests are articulated and concerted, and ultimately expressed with one voice at the regional level. The concept of regionness defines the position of a particular region in terms of its cohesion. This can be seen as a long-term endogenous historical process, changing over time from coercion—the building of empires and nations in history—to voluntary cooperation—the current (and unique) logic of regionalization. The political ambition of establishing regional cohesion and identity has been of primary importance in the ideology of the regionalist project (regionalism), but a convergence of values may take place even if this is not the explicit purpose of the project itself, typically focussing on economic or security issues. Regionalization may in other words also evolve without the support of regionalism, that is, in the absence of a regionalist project. In general and abstract terms one can speak of five levels of regionness:

Regional social space is a geographic area, delimited generally by natural, physical barriers and populated by largely non-related local groups of people. The region is thus objectively rooted in territory; in social terms the region is organized by human inhabitants, at first in relatively isolated communities, and later constituting some kind
of translocal relationship which can result from demographic change or changes in transport technology. Anyway, the regional space is ultimately filled up.

This increased density of contacts, implying more durable relations, is what creates a regional social system, or in security terms: an immature “regional security complex” (Buzan and Weaver 2003). This precarious situation has often in history led to an empire, or even more often to pendulum movements between a centralized and a more or less decentralized order. European feudalism after Empire was an enduring form of the latter, whereas China best exemplifies the former. It could also be a colonial empire imposed from outside as in Latin America or South Asia. The point is that the centralized system achieves order by being coercive, which is different from today’s voluntary regionalism emerging from decentralized states-systems. Decolonization created states-system in the former colonial empires.

The region as international society, or in realist terms “anarchical society” (Bull 1977) implies a set of rules that makes interstate relations more enduring and predictable (less anarchic), and thus more peaceful, or at least less violent. It can be either organized (de jure) or more spontaneous (de facto). In the case of a more institutionalized cooperation, region is constituted by the members of the regional organization. As demonstrated in the case of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), this does not necessarily imply a peaceful community. States are still dominant actors, but the pattern of relations is becoming increasingly regulated, predictable and more and more “society-like”. The European Concert in the nineteenth century provides one example, as does East Asia today. The relative calm in this type of order does not exclude the potential for hostility, even political breakdown and war.

The region as community takes shape when an enduring organizational framework (formal or less formal) facilitates and promotes social communication and convergence of values, norms and behaviour throughout the region, which implies identity formation on the regional level. Thus emerges a transnational civil society characterized by social trust at this level. The crucial test is whether the use of force in resolving conflicts is conceived as possible or not, creating a “security community”, first conceptualized by Karl Deutsch(ref) The Nordic region and later the EU were cases in point. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Mercosur in the Cone of Latin America are today mentioned as non-European cases of regional security communities (ref Adler).

Finally, region as institutionalized polity has a more fixed and permanent structure of decision-making and therefore stronger acting capability or actorship. Such regional polity does not have to be characterized by the normal terminology used to describe political systems but can be sui generis, as in the case of Europe, or Europolicy. No other regions in the world can at present be described in these terms.

The approach of seeing region as process implies an evolution of deepening regionalism, not necessarily following the idealized, staged model presented above, which mainly serves a heuristic purpose. Since regionalism is a political project, created by human actors, it may move not only in different directions but might indeed also fail, just as a nation-state project as we have seen in too many cases. Seen from this perspective, decline would mean fragmentation, decreasing regionness and dilution of identity. Enlargement, or “widening”, also implies decreasing regionness, at least initially, before full convergence. Throughout the EU’s history this trend has been countered by reforms aimed at “deepening”. Widening and deepening can thus be seen as a dialectic of loss and gain with regard to regionness.

2. Presence
Europe as external actor is more than the EU’s foreign policy, and more even than the aggregate of the EU’s policies across all areas of its activity. Simply by existing, and due to its relative weight (demographically, economically and ideologically), the Union has an impact on the rest of the world. Its footprints are seen everywhere. This also provokes reactions and creates expectations from outside. Bretherton and Vogler (2006) use the concept “presence” to signify this phenomenon, which constitutes the bridge between endogenous and exogenous factors, or between regionness and actorness, to be discussed below. A stronger presence implies more capacity to act, unless we are dealing with a sleeping giant (who anyhow must wake up sooner or later). The actor must be subjectively conscious about its presence and prepared to make use of it in order to achieve higher levels of actorness. In the “near abroad” presence is particularly strong, and can develop into outright absorption of new territory (enlargement). To the extent that an enlarged region can retain the same level of actorness, its presence will increase because of sheer size. The original European Economic Community (EEC) contained 185 million people, compared with today’s number in excess of 450 million. European integration has in fact become the unification, and even extension, of Europe.

As the EU grows as an institutionalized polity, its presence in the world naturally increases, since size is one of the dimensions of presence. Each enlargement implies a new neighbourhood, often defined in security terms and thus in need of stabilization. Enlargement does thus solve one particular security problem by internalizing it, at the same time as the problematic security complex is transformed. The secret behind the EU’s success in this regard is its transformative power: to invite the other to become a partner, rather than imposing its own will. What is enlarged is not “Europe” but a particular economic and political system, or even a community of values (Leonard 2005: 110). With continuous enlargement the internal cohesion and consistency may become compromised, creating a confidence crisis, which was for instance about to happen as Turkey was to start negotiating for membership in October 2005. The deepening process is supposed to prevent such crises, whereas the enlargement process should prevent security crises in the “near abroad”. Expansion means dilution, loss in regionness, but increased impact in terms of presence.

Presence is thus a complex and comprehensive, material variable, depending on the size of the actor, the scope of its external activities, the relative importance of different issue areas (so far trade and economic cooperation have for instance been more in focus than conflict management, particularly in relation to military means), and the relative dependence of various regions upon the European market (Africa being more dependent than Asia). A stronger presence means more repercussions and reactions and thereby a pressure to act. In the absence of such action, presence itself will diminish.

3. Actorness

Actorness—usually referring to external behaviour—implies a scope of action and room for manoeuvre, in some cases even a legal personality. The idea of international actor capability (with respect to the EU’s external policies) was first developed by Gunnar Sjöstedt (1977) and further elaborated by Bretherton and Vogler (1999, 2006) as “actorness”. Purposive ability to act is of course also relevant internally, for instance in the cases of what have been referred to as security regionalism, development regionalism and environmental regionalism—three areas in which increased regional cooperation may make a difference in the region itself (Hettne 2001). In the EU, actorness is closely related to the controversial issue of “competencies” (who has the right to decide what?), ultimately determined by the member states. Actorness is thus a phenomenon closely related to regionness; the latter implies an endogenous process of
increasing cohesiveness, while the former suggests a growing capacity to act that follows from the strengthened “presence” of the regional unit in different contexts, as well as from the actions that follow the interaction between the actor and its external environment. Actoriness with reference to the outside world is thus not only a simple function of regionness, but also an outcome of a dialectic process between endogenous and exogenous forces.

Bretherton and Vogler (2006: 30) identify four requirements for actoriness: (1) Shared commitment to a set of overarching shared values and principles; (2) Domestic legitimation of decision processes, and priorities, relating to external policy; (3) The ability to identify policy priorities and to formulate consistent and coherent policies; and (4) The availability of, and capacity to utilize, policy instruments (diplomacy, economic tools and military means).

Obviously, these requirements are fulfilled in different degrees in different Foreign Policy Relations (FPRs) and in different Foreign Policy Issue Areas (FPIAs); from the “near abroad” to faraway regions; and from the areas of trade—in which the EU is a strong actor—to security—where the responsibility given to the EU is contested and highly controversial. In other words actoriness is shifting over time, between issue areas and between regions. This has to do with the peculiar nature of the EU as an actor and the complexity of its foreign policy machinery. A strong national power, like the US, of course possesses these four requirements of actoriness and can use them to rule either by what is called hegemonic power (defined as accepted and thereby legitimate power), or by dominance (based on the use of coercion or open force). A weaker position necessitates more of a bargaining attitude. The most problematic requirement of actoriness appears to be that of domestic legitimation, in view of the much-discussed democratic deficit of the EU. This is posing a severe challenge to EU actoriness particularly in the security field. To this requirement should be added the requirement of justification to outsiders (Hill and Smith 2005).

The unique feature of regional (as compared to national great power) actoriness is that it must be created by voluntary processes and therefore depends more on dialogue and consensus building than on coercion. This mode of operating is the model Europe holds out as the preferred world order, since this is the way the new Europe (as organized by the EU) has developed in its more recent peaceful evolution, in contrast with its historically more violent development. With increased levels of actoriness in different fields of action and different parts of the world, Europe will be able to influence the world order towards its own preferred model of civilian power: dialogue, respect for different interests within an interregional, pluralist framework built on democracy, social justice and equality, multilateralism and international law (Telò 2006).

2. The shaping of a regional actor
The historical perspective applied in this analysis is that the current world order is in transformation (not necessarily transition) from a regional international system, which originated in Europe in the first part of the seventeenth century and was globalized in the twentieth century. The outcome of the transformation is unknown but the process is bound to be turbulent. The time of its birth was also a messy period, as one political order was in decay while a new order was about to emerge. The typical pre-modern political order, not only in Europe but also in most parts of the world, was the more or less centralized Empire. However, the immediate pre-Westphalian experience of the Europeans was an extremely decentralized political order that we call feudalism—essentially a collapsed empire. Empires tended to occupy the ‘natural region’. The world at that time could only be perceived as different world regions, since empire and
not the nation-state was the organizing principle. How this came to be a uniquely European world order, with Europe as an actor with a particular identity and a higher level of regionness, is discussed below in terms of the five levels of regionness.

A regional social space (pre-Westphalia)
Regional social space is the lowest degree of what was referred to above as “regionness”. In the regional social space that came to be called Europe, empire was a distant memory but also an impelling political ideal, when the continental polity became fragmented and was replaced by micro-units such as tribes, feudatories and emerging small kingdoms. The first European polity that showed some resemblance to classical empire was the territory under control of Charlemagne in the ninth century—considered by many to be the core of “Europe”. Under the subsequent period of high medievalism, this space became a more consolidated cultural area, based on Latin Christendom as the integrative ideology. In this process of identity formation, there were two significant Others: the Byzantine and the Islamic worlds. An identity of “Europe” as territory slowly became a secular alternative to the religious non-territorial identity. This alternative, Civil Europe, was marked by multiculturalism, resistance to centralized power, and eventually a civil society more or less distinct from state power. Peoples in this regional social space began to share a number of cultural practices, including a common experience (for the elites) of higher education, received from universities established throughout Europe.

The pre-Westphalian order was a multilevel system with diffuse and constantly shifting authority structures without clear territorial borders and with no absolute authority. This system was not systematic but rather a bewildering mixture of often-incompatible elements: the Christian Church represented by the Pope—a church divided between Catholics and Protestants—an empire project with the purpose of unifying Europe under one emperor within one centralized order, feudal lords ruling over a subjugated peasantry, emerging kings who originated from the major feudal lords and who controlled large pieces of territory, long distance trading networks that covered most of Europe and linked it with the outside world, local marketplaces, and an emerging bourgeoisie in semi-independent cities, which played a crucial part in the economic and political order.

A regional social system (Westphalia 1648 - 1815)
Frustrated attempts were made to transform this decentralized and periodically chaotic (‘dark age’) polity into an empire, built on the ideal of the Roman Empire, whose order (Pax Romana) had crumbled upon the disintegration of the empire. After hundreds of years this contradictory structure in the 17th century exploded in an equally contradictory war (a war with many actors operating at different levels of the system and pursuing different goals) and, ultimately, a new political order—Westphalia—was born. It grew out of the power of the king (absolutism), and resulted in the sovereign, territorial state, which in turn implied the end of local power, as well as of continental, all-European political and economic structures. All power was now monopolized by the state. This also meant that there was no overarching power, that is, a situation of “anarchy” as it was later termed by political theorists of the so-called realist school. The swing of the pendulum between centralization and decentralization did not stop with this new system of Westphalia, in spite of the fact that its logic was based on anti-hegemonic principles and anti-hegemonic warfare, if necessary. Throughout European
history there have been several efforts to create hegemony or dominion (for instance Louis XIV, Napoleon and Hitler), provoking anti-hegemonic wars to re-establish the balance of power.

The absolute state also enjoyed absolute power over the economy, which was subordinated to the state interest (mercantilism) due to the functional relationship between a strong economy and a strong state. The strong state could also control territories overseas. The process of nation formation in Europe did not imply isolationism, as far as the rest of the world was concerned. The more successful nation-states competed not only in Europe but took their struggle to other continents, which were run as colonial empires – appendices of Europe. Europe thereby came to rule the world, not as a single actor but through its major nation-states dividing the world among themselves. The European regional system of states became a world-system (Bull and Watson 1984). European wars were consequently waged on many theatres across the world. The colonized “savages” became a new “Other” in shaping European identity. This time the “Other” was defined by its lack of “civilization”, understood as non-modern and later as “backward” or “underdeveloped”. The Third World took form. Absolutism, mercantilism and imperialism went together.

Governance functions were monopolized by the emerging kingdoms; a sort of compromise (absolutism) between centralization (imperial order) and decentralization (feudal order). There was therefore a certain loss of regionness on the continental level, as the new territorial states became economically introverted (through mercantilism) and later trapped in an assertive ethnic identity (through nationalism). Nationness successfully competed with regionness. This also meant a subordination of the “historical regions” below the level of the nation-state. Historical regions refer to subnational regions with a high degree of regionness in terms of shared history, cultural identity, ethnicity and language, in contradistinction to administrative subdivisions of the nation-state, which are also sometimes called (subnational) regions. Historical regions were potential nations. However they were too small to compete with more composite and powerful nation-states. As these nation-states came much later to share power with the supranational polity, the historical regions also asserted themselves.

Through growing internal social and economic relations, Europe had become a regional social system. In security terms this system was mostly violent, but complexity was reduced as “state” became identical with “territory”, and wars became territorial rather than religious (Heffernan 1998: 17). The number of actors was reduced and the modern political map took form. The state-building process (that is, the carving out of political territories) in Europe was violent, so people gradually learnt to conceive of their “own” state as protector, and the rest of the world as “anarchy”, a threat to their security. Europe was still a dangerous place—a violent system, or (an immature) regional security complex.

A regional international society (1815 – 1945)
Throughout European modern history there have been several efforts to create geopolitical hegemony or dominion, provoking ‘anti-hegemonic’ wars. These attempts at continental control have come from the dominant nations: France and Germany (Preussia), whereas England and Holland have been ‘guardians’ of the principle of balance of power (Watson, 1992). Progress was for military reasons identified with economic development, which in the 19th century meant industrialization. The state ultimately became responsible for what came to be called ‘development’, and the nation-state territory became the privileged space (container) in which development was to take place, security to be guaranteed and welfare to be created. The world order was a
regional European system (with non-European colonial satellites), stabilized by what became known as the European Concert. The ‘anarchy’ thereby became an ‘anarchical society’ (Bull, 1977). This improvement of political order in the European region facilitated the break-through of market society. The European Concert provided peace in the nineteenth century, but in spite of economic integration facilitated by ‘the long peace’ the continent was plagued by increasing tensions towards the end of the century and by destructive wars in the first half of the twentieth century. A new Europe had to be built on new foundations.

A regional community (1945 – 1990)
The second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of an economic regional community: the EEC/EU. The “Europeanization” of Europe is a complex term if it is taken to mean the existence of a model Europe towards which real processes converge. No such master model ever existed. The process is more complex, combining forces from above and from below. Europeanization implies increasing sameness of the units in a system to the extent that the units experience a shared destiny, without necessarily giving up their individuality. In contrast with nation-states, modern regional formations are pluralistic and have to be, since the integration process now is voluntary. As soon as there is a feeling of imposition, a revolt among member states becomes likely. A distinction can be made between regionalization from below in the larger, “real” region, and harmonization of the formal organized region, steered from above through a political/bureaucratic system (regionalism). However the two processes are interlinked so a strict distinction cannot be maintained. It is typically the case in “the community method” that harmonization attempts are premature, leading to backlashes.

The regionalization process was constituted by different forms of convergence: on the levels of political regimes, economic homogenization, and in the way security arrangements are organized. Regime convergence implies the reduction of differences within a particular political space, in this case an emerging region. The homogenization of essential features of the political system can be seen as a precondition for joining the EU, and thus as a factor explaining enlargement. Normally a country Europeanizes before being adopted as “European” and forming part of the EU, whereby regionalization from below changes into harmonization and coordination from above.

The recent (post-1957) process of political homogenization in Europe has gone through three phases: (i) in the south, the disappearance of fascist regimes in the mid-1970s; (ii) in the west, the more widespread self-assertion of the European Atlantic partners in the field of security, beginning in the early 1980s; and (iii) in the east, the fall of the communist regimes in the late 1980s and the Soviet collapse in 1991. Regime convergence must be distinguished from fluctuating political trends (government convergence or divergence). Neoliberal or socialist regionalism, as the case may be, must thus be understood on a different level than democratic regionalism. However, different policy lines of different governments may of course also hamper the process of convergence as long as different domestic situations lead to different political outcomes.

The magnetism of the EU has stimulated dramatic political changes in the neighbourhood, to a large extent through the encouragement of resistance against dictatorship and of democratic social and political movements. The elimination of the southern dictatorships in the 1970s removed some embarrassing anomalies from the European scene and put the continent on the road towards political homogeneity—a basic precondition for substantial economic integration. The regional social space expanded, and so subsequently did the European community.
The second political change, more related to the general political climate in Europe, was a broad rejection of US hegemony when, as part of the “second cold war”, it involved deployment of new missiles on European territory. The great peace demonstrations in the capitals of northern Europe in the early 1980s had undermined the Atlantic bridge, and in the late 1980s there were further signs of a more fundamental European autonomy from the US. There was Europeanness in the air. The Atlantic alliance had never run entirely smoothly, but now the parting of ways seemed more definite. Atlanticism, however, remained strong in some countries, and this constituted a severe division in Europe. But as was clearly shown in the early 1980s (and again after 2001) Atlanticism is generally stronger among governments than among peoples of Europe, at least in the western part. As far as former Eastern Europe is concerned, convergence is explained by the fact that the communist system simply had exhausted its potential, not least as a model of development.

The transformation in the post-communist countries can be interpreted as forming part of the general homogenization process, or the Europeanization of Europe coming from below. The Soviet Union’s withdrawal from dominance in Eastern Europe dramatically reinforced the “de-Eastern Europeanization” process, which had been ongoing for some time, at varying speeds in different countries. The countries in eastern and central Europe became free to leave the Eastern Bloc, to the extent that they were welcome into “Europe”. If we take the ex-communist countries in Eastern Europe as our main cases in point, we can identify at least three important aspects of the transformation (or transition—the new word for development): the creation of a more pluralist political system, the retreat of the state from the economy, and the deeper integration of the countries in question into the world economy. This package imposed from outside was seen as the credibility test of the fledgling market democracies in the east.

The process of economic homogenization, associated with uniform national adaptations to globalization, has led to a state of liberal hegemony in Europe, although at the beginning the policy of state interventionism was widespread. The first economic regional institutions in post-war Western Europe were the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) (1951) and the European Community (EC) (1957). These must be seen in the context of the cold war. Behind the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (1959) was, firstly, the traditional British national interest of avoiding involvement in any supranational European scheme, and, secondly, diverse national security interests of minor states expressed in different forms of neutrality. In Eastern Europe the context for regionalization was also geopolitically determined. In the case of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) (1949) the national interests involved seem to have reflected the principle of “the less integration, the better”. In fact, most cooperation within the bloc was simply bilateral and the CMEA was a hindrance rather than an instrument of regional integration. The CMEA was not accepted by the EC as a counterpart, simply because it lacked actorship. A more relaxed security situation signalled its dissolution. Much the same can be said of the EFTA, which, as neutrality disappeared from the security agenda, gradually became a “waiting room” for the EU membership candidates.

Security is the third field of convergence and coordination. The two post-war military blocs, albeit with a group of neutrals in between, manifestly expressed Europe’s political subordination to the superpowers. It was an era of hegemonic regionalism throughout the world, imposed from above and from outside. From the viewpoint of economic organization, the security imperative imposed a more or less corresponding cleavage pattern. Since economics is commonly seen as belonging to the
area of “low politics”, there tends to be more change and flexibility in the economic field. In periods of détente it became evident that economic contacts tended to follow a logic of their own. In periods of high tension, economic relations, in contrast, had to adapt to the political imperatives built into the security arrangement. All this underlines the predominance of the security factor. In spite of this, the security factor was not until recently expressed in institutional and policy terms. The breakup of Jugoslavia was here the major learning process.

An institutionalized regional polity (1991 -)

The EU is, in terms of regionness, thus far the only example of an institutionalized regional polity—at present hovering between intergovernmentalism and supranational governance—but with an uncertain future, due to a new wave of euro scepticism and the decreased coherence and consistency following the inflow of new members. The controversies have been in the fields of economic policy and security. As the EU started to become an institutionalized polity in the 1990s the economic foundation became more liberal than earlier due to domestic political changes in the member states. The economic regionalization of Europe arising out of the intensification of the internal market project has thus so far been fully consistent with market-led economic globalization. Indeed both processes have been founded on the same neo-liberal paradigm. The economic convergences contributing to increasing regionness occurred in a context of liberalization, deregulation and orthodox anti-inflationary policies, which were built into the constitutional future of Europe, as spelled out in the Maastricht Treaty (1991). In the subsequent years the European Monetary Union (EMU) became the main route to integration. The convergence criteria of the EMU illustrate a process of regionalization (or regionalism) directed from above (harmonization) and in accordance with a strict schedule, although occasionally and selectively generous in its application due to public resistance to financial orthodoxy. Clearly, it is difficult to distinguish the politics from the economics of monetary integration. More recently the problems of the European Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) underlined the dangers of political divergence within a monetary bloc, raising doubts about the viability of the EMU. With a single currency, fiscal indiscipline in one state clearly has implications for others. We may, however, also face a more complicated situation in which there is genuine disagreement about the correct economic policy. Is financial orthodoxy (neo-liberalism type Hayek) or some kind of neo-Keynesianism the need of the day? This question surfaced with the crises in the SGP, which was part of the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 and rendered it imperative for the Euro-countries to sustain the criteria for membership in the currency union indefinitely. This is of course a clear case of harmonization – regionalization from above. In March 2005 the finance ministers of the Eurozone agreed on a much looser pact, which raised concerns that the pact was dead, leading to a process of divergence.

Regime convergence has preceded the formal integration process, since only democratic, market-oriented polities can merge with the European polity. The adaptation to a political order, compatible with European values, has been and to some extent continues to be a major source of change in Greater Europe. This process is far from finished. Former ‘Eastern Europe’ has been successfully integrated on the basis of liberalism, but in the Balkans the EU has faced a major security crisis with the current problems in Kosovo constituting the last phase.

3. The quality of actorship
A number of convergencies create a basis for external action but by themselves they do not constitute effective actorship. A supranational structure of some sort is necessary in order to avoid divisions among member countries. Furthermore, the various institutions must constitute a coherent framework rather than just adding one institution to another. Europe is the most institutionalized regional actor. At present, however, its performance as a global actor is not particularly impressive. Its presence is of course still important but the other dimensions of actorship—regionness and actorness—are in decline due to fragmentation and lack of ‘deepening’ reforms. The Union has lost momentum, as far as purposeful regional integration is concerned. At the same time various problems, which need to be managed jointly, continue to accumulate: global poverty, security threats, environment, refugee migration and economic recession. The fundamental problem is that the EU institutions were originally designed around a limited number of countries, in a different age and with a different purpose. The European project grew out of a cold war context and a transatlantic alliance, and was intended to create a coherent and homogeneous capitalist core out of the competing great powers of Europe. The process of deepening (institution building) is now lagging far behind enlargement, threatening all dimensions of actorship, ultimately dependent on how ‘Europe’ is subjectively conceived by its inhabitants more and more attracted by the politics of identity. If they do not feel European, ‘Europe’ will fade away.

**Institutionalization of actorship: The European Foreign Policy Complex**

Actorness implies mechanisms for policymaking and implementation. For a state this is relatively simple to account for—we turn to the ministry of foreign affairs. For a regional actor it is a different story. The foreign policy system of the EU is so complex that it may be more appropriate to refer to it as the [European Foreign Policy Complex](#) (EFPC). Apart from being a contradictory historical product, the current complexity derives from many factors.

Firstly, there are at least two political levels: the level of the individual nation-states (27 foreign ministries), insisting on their right to pursue their own foreign policies; and the union level, divided between the community—where the Commission is driving—and the European Council—where the governments of the member states can take collective decisions if they so wish. The Council thus formally belongs to the level of the member states, but, to the extent that qualified majority voting takes place and there is a mobilization behind important concerns, it will constitute a level of its own above the member states. We can see this as a third, ‘in-between’ level. The European parliament, where there also are nationalist parties critical of the European project, sometimes represent Europe sometimes the member states. Much theorizing is devoted to the nature of these levels and their interrelations in different policy areas.

Secondly, the EFPC contains three distinct policy areas characterized by different responsibilities with regard to where decisions are taken—the so-called “pillars” of trade and economic cooperation, security and defence, and justice and home affairs. Through their external implications (presence) they are each important for the EU as a global actor. The Treaty of Rome in 1957 was above all concerned with the international trade regime, and also provided for a customs union, which was subsequently established in 1968. This “first pillar” made the EC a global actor in trade negotiations, with presence and actorness mutually supporting each other. The “second pillar” is understood to encompass cooperation among the member states in the foreign policy and security fields. It is mildly paradoxical that this cooperation is extremely sensitive and controversial, at the same time as the entire integration project is officially described as a historical peace project. Thus, security is described as the core of the EU.
project, but it seems instead to be an indirect effect of cooperation, which should not be seen in explicitly direct terms. The “third pillar”—cooperation in justice and internal affairs—commenced in the 1970s, during a period of heightened terrorism throughout Europe. Due to sensitivities about national security this cooperation took place discreetly, without formal binding agreements (Smith 2003: 31, 47ff).

On the other hand the increased seriousness of the issue imposed itself on the member states. The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 gave this cryptic area the high-sounding name of “area of freedom, security and justice” (AFSJ), fulfilling the promise of bringing the EU “closer to the citizens”. In spite of this promise the Amsterdam Treaty moved many items to the first (supranational) pillar, creating a contradiction between effectiveness and legitimacy. Thus, the AFSJ is an area of cross-pillar operation. In fact a large number of issues would be more effectively handled by more such cross-pillar operation, or a complete abandoning of the pillared approach—which was in fact a key purpose of the proposed EU constitution, presently in limbo (but with signs of revival). This has been a main setback for the pursuit of coherence and consistency, affecting the various components of actorship.

As a third component of the FPC, there are several institutions (apart from the Commission and the Council, and including the European Parliament and special agencies) and policy instruments that are active in various issue areas, depending on which pillar is activated. Most effective instruments are located within pillar one, but need to be applied in pillars two and three to give them more strength.

Finally, various objectives (interests and norms) are pursued within the FPC; for instance regional cooperation, human rights, democracy and good governance, conflict prevention, sustainable development, security and fighting international crime (Smith 2003). Ultimately, the larger objective of the FPC is multilateral global governance and a regionalized (interregionalism) world order. These objectives are subject to the criteria of coherence and consistency. Coordination to satisfy these criteria takes place both vertically (between member states and the Union), and horizontally between the member states (consistency) and between the pillars and objectives (coherence). The consistency/coherence imperative drives the FPC towards more effective coordination, which to some extent implies supranational centralization. Thus with time the FPC may lose some of its complexity. But it should be recognized that the FPC itself changes over time, and in different Foreign Policy Issue Areas (FPIAs) and Foreign Policy Relations (FPRs), due to a number of endogenous and exogenous factors: organizational changes, a growing number of members with shifting interests and norms (endogenous factors), and responses to external expectations and challenges (exogenous factors).

The EU has dealt with the external world in a different manner from that of an ordinary great power driven by geopolitical interests. This is because the civilian power employed in the EU’s own region-building is also being projected in its external relations as the preferred world order model (Telò 2006, Linklater 2005). Some would call this a kind of imperialism—“soft imperialism” (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005). It is clear that the policies have failed to instill confidence in the partners, whether Arab, Indian, Latin American, African or otherwise. However, the outcome is, in spite of all contradictions, a pattern of global governance with its own distinctive characteristics and with the potential of becoming a world order characterized by a horizontal, institutionalized, multipolar structure of regions cooperating in a spirit of multilateralism. Such a regionalized, multilateral world order could be called “multiregionalism”. In the next section we discuss how this special kind of power is applied in different foreign policy relations.
The geography of actorship: European Foreign Policy Relations

EU’s foreign policy relations (EFPRs) takes four main forms: enlargement (towards the core area of Europe), stabilization (in ‘the neighbourhood’), bilateralism (towards great and strong powers), and interregionalism (towards regions and regional organizations). Interregionalism (of course apart from enlargement) is the most typically ‘European’ way of relating with the outside world. The four relationships are partly explained by the principle of distance, which in turn leads to four types of counterparts: prospective members, neighbours, great powers, and more far away regions, such as Africa, Asia and Latin America. Obviously the borderlines between these categories are uncertain and subject to change (basically a political process). Equally obvious is the difficulty in dealing with all these relations, making up the rest of the world, in a serious way.

Enlargement policy covers acceding countries (Bulgaria and Romania were the latest to join), candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia) and potential candidate countries (the Western Balkans, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo). The enlargements have concerned either well-integrated European countries, whose entries were, for various reasons, delayed, or less developed countries and politically turbulent, integrated into the European mainstream mainly for security reasons.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), with the aim of stabilizing the EU’s neighbourhood, offers a privileged relationship with the EU’s neighbours. A crucial component of the ENP is its commitment to promote democratization and human rights in combination with the principles of good governance, rule of law, market economy and sustainable development. There are no obvious criteria indicating what is to be regarded as non-Europe, other than geographical distance which also tends to become relative. The boundary is ultimately politically determined. ‘Eastern Europe’ thus was a political concept and is now considered as central Europe. In the post-Soviet area—the European part (except of course the Baltic sub-region that is now part of the EU) and the Caucasus and Central Asia—the EU presence is weak, and there is little leverage for influence (Dannreuther 2004). The neighbourhood area coincides to a large degree with Russia’s Near Abroad. Russia has claimed the role as stabilizer in this area but lacks a coherent security policy, except for the simple policy of control, with some neo-imperialist overtones, strengthened by the anti-terrorist objective. The neighbourhood plays an important role in the EU’s more coherent and comprehensive security strategy (Charillon 2004). In a similar fashion, the Barcelona process is a strategy of cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours, where peace is the first priority, in accordance with the basic concern for stability. The Mediterranean “region” does not exist in a formal sense, but is rather a pure social construction shaped by the EU’s own security concerns.

The EU has developed a series of bilateral relationships with United States, Russia, Canada, Mexico, China, Japan, India and South Africa. In some cases this completes, and in other cases replaces, genuine region-to-region links. Among the bilateral partners the US is the most powerful. In fact the challenges and problems posed by its military superiority cannot be balanced, and its imperial policy cannot be influenced, according to the old realist recipe of balance of power politics. What remains is what has been called “soft balancing”, which can be seen as a form of civil power, implying different kinds of non-violent resistance. This policy was practised by both small and large powers in connection with the Iraq war and may increase in importance if the USA maintains its commitment to “imperial” policies. In spite of a tremendous degree of contact on the level of civil society, the formal interregional transatlantic links (EU–NAFTA) are institutionally weak or non-existent (Aggarwal and Fogarty 2006).
relations between the EU and Russia are similar to those between the EU and the USA, in the sense that Russia also prefers bilateralism, and takes a realist, power-oriented approach. Nevertheless the EU maintains a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia, which covers human rights, trade, security and justice.

During the last decade, interregional cooperation in a more institutionalized form has become an increasingly important component of the EU’s FPRs. However it is a perception strongly linked to the Commission and barely exists on the level of the member states who stick to their own foreign policies. The regionalist policy is realized through a large number of interregional arrangements, particularly those with faraway counterparts in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where EU interests often clash with those of the US (especially in relation to Latin America). That the EU constitutes the hub of these interregional arrangements is in full accordance with its regionalist ideology, encompassing not only trade and foreign investment but also political dialogue and cultural relations between the regions. The EU’s ambition is also to formalize the relations as being between regional bodies and regions (“pure” interregionalism) rather than the more diffuse informal, transregional or bilateral contacts. However, for pragmatic reasons, interregional relations take on a bewildering variety of forms. In the cases of Japan and China (and to some extent Brazil), the EU bilateral relation complements the interregional relations (ASEM and Mercosur). Interregionalism thus forms a part of EUs foreign policy.

The EU also organizes intercontinental summits such as the EU-Africa summit process and the EU-Latin American summits. These are highly rhetorical with little substance. ASEM, the Asia-Europe meeting, is more institutionalized and discussed under interregionalism below. The most recent EU-Africa summit took place in Lisbon, December, 2007. In the Lisbon declaration the two partners declared to be ‘determined to work together in the global arena on the key political challenges of our time, such as energy and climate change, migration or gender issues … and to build a new strategic political partnership for the future, overcoming the traditional donor-recipient relationship and building on common values and goals in our pursuit of peace and stability, democracy and rule of law, progress and development.’ As fundamental commitments the declaration mentioned: the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals; the establishment of a robust peace and security architecture in Africa; the strengthening of investment, growth and prosperity through regional integration and closer economic ties; the promotion of good governance and human rights; and the creation of opportunities for shaping global governance in an open and multilateral framework.

The first Summit between the Heads of State and Government of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union was held in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, June 1999. The objective of the Rio Summit was to strengthen the political, economic and cultural understanding between the two continents in order to encourage the development of a strategic partnership, establishing a set of priorities for future joint action in the political and economic fields. The Rio Summit also established the strategic partnership between the EU and the LAC regions. Every two years, a high level meeting of Heads of States and Governments between the EU-Latin America & Caribbean (LAC) take place. The intercontinental summits are not very substantial in terms of political decision making. We could see them as general transregional relations which could become more institutionalized with time and thus take a more formal interregional form.

Interregionalism is a recent and badly understood phenomenon in international
relations. There is no consensus as far as definitions are concerned. Some use the concept broadly to describe the EU relations with other regions: group-to-group dialogue (Edwards & Regelsberg, 1990). More recently it is used to signify a systemic international phenomenon, namely linkages built among regions in general: the new interregionalism (Hänggi, 2006). I find it important to distinguish between interregionalism as a formalized relation between regional organizations, and relations among regions in a more general and less formal sense: transregionalism (which is a natural part of globalization). The former reveals an intention to build institutionalised regionalism. The latter includes relations between all kinds of regional actors, as well as a formal regional organization, on the one hand, and other diverse actors, state and non-state, on the other (hybrid). A growing and increasingly dense global network of transregional and interregional links ultimately implies a regionalized world order, which (assuming an open cooperative system) can be termed regional multilateralism or, for short, ‘multiregionalism’. This would be one way of restoring multilateralism in a new form.

There is no reason why the various transregional relations among different actors, constituting an emerging structure of global governance, should take a single form, hence the frustrating attempts at making clear and unambiguous definitions. There is no single actor strategy, but many unintended outcomes of different policies in different issue areas and in different policy relations. The conceptualizations of interregionalism as more or less ‘pure’ suggest that there are normal and abnormal situations. It is the variety of arrangements that will characterize global governance – not the predominance of one type, such as formal or ‘pure’ interregionalism. The concentration of interregional relations to the Triad is natural in view of the thickness of economic as well as other relations. This does not imply that there is no need for interregional cooperation in other regional contexts. Rather there is until now a weaker development of such needs and the ability to deal with them.

**Conclusion: The future of actorship**

At present Europe’s performance as a global actor is not particularly impressive. Its presence is of course still important but the other dimensions of actorship—regionness and actorness—are in decline. Since the negative referenda in 2005 on the proposed European constitution the European integration process has been in deep crisis. After two years the EU members agreed to make a new effort in line with the tradition of growing though crises. The internal weakening will nevertheless impact on Europe as a global actor, since the two processes of internal integration and external influence are strongly entwined.

The Union has lost momentum, as far as purposeful regional integration is concerned. At the same time various problems, which need to be managed jointly, continue to accumulate: security, environment, refugee migration and economic recession. The fundamental problem is that the EU institutions were originally designed around a limited number of countries, in a different age and with a different purpose. The project grew out of a context of Cold War and a transatlantic alliance, and was intended to create a coherent and homogeneous capitalist core out of the competing great powers of Europe. The process of deepening is now lagging far behind enlargement, threatening all dimensions of actorship.

The EU is, in terms of regionness, thus far the only example of an institutionalized regional polity—at present hovering between intergovernmentalism and supranational governance—but with an uncertain future, due to a new wave of euroscepticism and the decreased coherence and consistency following the inflow of
new members. Regime convergence has preceded the formal integration process, since only democratic, market-oriented polities can merge with the European polity. The adaptation to a political order, compatible with European values, has been and to some extent continues to be a major source of change in Greater Europe. The EU has dealt with the external world in a different manner than that of an ordinary great power driven by geopolitical interests. This is because the civilian power employed in the EU’s own region-building is also being projected in its external relations as the preferred world order model (Telò 2006, Linklater 2005). Some would call this a kind of imperialism—“soft imperialism” (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005). It is clear that the policies have failed to instill confidence in the partners, whether Arab, Indian, Latin American, African or otherwise. However, the outcome is, in spite of all contradictions, a pattern of global governance with its own distinctive characteristics and with the potential of becoming a world order characterized by a horizontal, institutionalized, multipolar structure of regions cooperating in a spirit of multilateralism. Such a regionalized, multilateral world order could be called “multiregionalism”. The question is to what extent this potential is realized by today’s European politicians and other decision-makers, as well as by the sceptical European public. This is a question of future European regionness and actorness, and in case of decline even presence can be turned into a vacuum.

Returning to the four preconditions of actorness discussed in the first section, the conclusion must be drawn that actorness, at present, is not expanding. The enlargement to 27 countries represents, by itself, a loss of actorness, particularly as the new eastern members tend to sympathize more with US positions than with “old” Europe. Regime convergence cannot be taken forgranted. Divergence between various regimes and thus a dilution of the European mainstream is a distinct possibility. Many Europeans feel uneasy about the direction in which the EU is heading. A positive view in relation to this might however also interpret the explicit criticism emerging from below as the first step towards a European public debate on European issues, which is necessary for reasons of credibility and legitimacy, with implications also for external impact.

It has been mentioned here that most of the FPRs contain strong elements of “South” dimensions: fighting poverty, promoting human rights, stabilization and intervention in acute conflicts. Enlargement and neighbourhood policies are both driven by the need for stabilization in the close areas. The purpose of bilateralism is global stability. Interregionalism, by definition covering various issue areas, is a consequence of the EU’s policy of creating and relating to regions as the preferred counterparts in the Global South.

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