

Regional Cooperation and State Sovereignty

By Babalola Abegunde*

Bearing in mind that international cooperation and solidarity are fundamental principles underlying the endeavour of international law, reflected in General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) which affirms the duty of states to cooperate with one another in accordance with the Charter, as well as international agreements, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Treaty on Principle Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, and the Antarctic Treaty which reflect and address global concerns. This paper is a desk-based (non-empirical) research which examines the impacts and implications as well as theories of regional integration or cooperation on the member state's sovereignty, among others. It reveals regional cooperation has both the upside and downside. It concludes that regional cooperation is global trend; it will have different effects in different regions and development issues.

Keywords: *Obstacles; Impacts State Cooperation; Regionalism; Rational; Supranationalism; State Integration; State Sovereignty.*

Introduction

Regional integration is an attempt to realise mutual gains from cooperation within a group of self-motivated states in an anarchical international system¹. In order to attain successful regional cohesion, the states have to overcome collective action problems that are endemic to international cooperation. Regional cooperation is often promoted by both academics and politicians as a way for states to address important developmental challenges. However, the willingness to cooperate on different issues varies greatly across different policy fields². Regionalism across national borders has become a global phenomenon, there is no single nation sovereign state that has not joined some Trans-national Regional Organisations (TRO).³ Crisis and urgency are today the “new normal” of politics, a phenomenon experienced at the local, national and international levels. When this breach with the “normalised” framework of politics ceases to be temporary and when crises and urgency become a constant mode of political organisation, then the question of the relationship between crises, urgency and sovereignty arises.⁴

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¹Yoshimatsu (2008).

²Soderbaum & Spandler (2019).

³Schmitter (2007).

⁴Blouin-Genest, Wagner & Verjans (2020).

This paper specifically examines to how and to what extent regional cooperation/integration affects national sovereignty. The paper shows that even in hard times, regional cooperation/integration is and remains a structural and changing feature of a multilayered global governance.⁵

Conceptual Evaluation

The following concepts, namely: state sovereignty, regional cooperation and regional integration appear in this chapter, hence the need to understand their meaning.

State Sovereignty

State Sovereignty is the concept that states are in complete and exclusive control of all the people and property within their territory⁶. State sovereignty also includes the idea that all states are equal as states⁷, when nations join with others in a trade or political bloc, they give up some national sovereignty. In a globalising world, nations feel pressure to join trade and political pacts. Often, those international groupings erode national sovereignty while offering diminished accountability at the wider policy-making level.⁸

A state may acquire sovereignty over territory if that territory is ceded or transferred to it by another state. Cession is typically affected by treaty. Territory (sovereignty) can also be acquired by conquest. Positively, sovereign states are able to provide fundamental political goods such as welfare, security and rule of law, to their own citizens and to take advantage of their negative sovereignty in order to choose, pursue and realise self-imposed goals by means of effective public policies.⁹

The purpose of government is to secure people's rights. Legitimately, sovereign governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed".¹⁰

Accordingly, sovereignty is a power, rather than a rights.¹¹ Sovereignty is the ability of a state to make laws for its citizens without external interference. Sovereignty both grants and restricts/limits powers, it gives states complete control over their own territory while restricting the influence that states have on one another.¹²

Sovereignty has two basic aspects, external and internal. Internally speaking, it means that state has supreme power over the people within its territorial domain,

⁵Telo' (2020).

⁶The Issue of Sovereignty (2016).

⁷Ibid.

⁸Political Integration and National Sovereignty (2011).

⁹Ronzoni (2012).

¹⁰Groves (2010).

¹¹UK Essays (2018).

¹²Maftef (2015); Grooves (2010).

and externally, it implies complete freedom from foreign rule.¹³ Hence, the basis of freedom, equality and justice is national sovereignty.¹⁴

Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation refers to the political and institutional mechanisms that countries in a general geographical region devise to find and strengthen common interests as well as promoting their national interests, through mutual cooperation and dialogue.¹⁵ World leaders recognise the crucial role of regional cooperation in implementing and assessing progress. Regionalism is being harnessed in addressing issues like trade, food and energy, security, climate change, connectivity and the outbreak of health epidemic.¹⁶ Regional cooperation refers to any form of working together by various countries to achieve a common objective without sacrificing their diverse individual interests.¹⁷

Regional Integration

Regional integration is a process in which neighbouring states enter into an agreement in order to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules.¹⁸ Regional integration is also known as the process by which two or more nation states agree to cooperate and work closely together to achieve peace, stability and wealth¹⁹. Regional integration has generally followed the logical progression from cooperation to integration.

Distinction between Cooperation and Integration

One can distinguish between regional cooperation and regional integration and lay the foundation to analysing their distinctive dynamics, as well as their eventual inter-connections. Much transnational regional cooperation, only a few of them constitute regional integration.²⁰ The former seems to be a precursor to the latter, i.e. states in a specific region seem to find it necessary to engage first in cooperation in order to build up mutual trust among elites and sufficient interdependencies among broader publics, before plunging into the much more risky and potentially rewarding business of integration, but the relation between the two seems highly contingent.²¹ One of the major objectives of a comprehensive theory of regionalism should be precisely to specify the conditions that make this possible. Withdrawal from regional cooperation is relatively easy, while the costs

¹³Berger (2010).

¹⁴Sharma (1951).

¹⁵Metzger (2008).

¹⁶Ki-Moon (2016).

¹⁷Akokpari (2008).

¹⁸Farida (2015).

¹⁹Farida (2015); Schiff (2003) at 9; Malthi (1999) at 13.

²⁰Schmitter (2007) at 8-10

²¹Ibid.

of withdrawing from regional integration are prohibitively high.²² The concepts of regional cooperation and integration tend to evolve very different sets of actors. While the former tend to be confined to a restricted set- usually ministers (and especially, if not exclusively, those of foreign affairs)- the latter not only penetrate more deeply into the ranks of the civil service of the respective member states, but also bring into the process representatives of class, sectoral and professional interests and eventually, those of a variety of social movements. One remarkable feature of regional integration is the participation of mass public.²³

It is pertinent to mention, that the concepts of cooperation and the concept of integration overlap sometimes. In this paper, both concepts are use loosely and interchangeably.

Theories of State/National Sovereignty

There are various theories that explain the concept of sovereignty.

Instrumental Notion of Sovereignty

Under this notion, the primary purpose of the state is in its ability to provide public goods to the people living under its rule following a straight-forward cost-benefit calculus. Hence, cooperation is allowed to solve transboundary problems like externalities and collective resources and achieve economies of scale. It is desirable if these benefits outweighs the cost of ceding national control over goods provision.²⁴

Principled Notion of Sovereignty

Under this notion, the state appears as the natural representative of the notion as an “imagined community” and as the guarantor of its integrity and autonomy.²⁵ Hence, regional cooperation is allowed to maintain national integrity and autonomy of the state.

Status Notion of Sovereignty

Status sovereignty seeks to portray the state as a legitimate member of the international community of states. This notion emphasises that the essence of sovereignty is recognition by domestic and international audiences, who judge a states’ authority against internationally shared legitimacy criteria like human rights, good governance, etcetera.²⁶ Cooperation is permitted to signal state legitimacy as rightful member of the international community.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Schmitter (2007) at 6

²⁵Schmitter (2007); Anderson (1983) at 72; Wiener (2009).

²⁶Reus-Smit (2001).

Theories of Regionalism

International relations theories have provided an explanation of how and under what conditions states have promoted cooperation to achieve collective interests of the entire region. There are various theories of regionalism²⁷ or schools of thought which dominate discussions about how national sovereignty hangs together with regional cooperation and integration (that is regionalism).

The Neo-Liberal Institutional and Neo-Functionalist Theories

Neo-Liberal Institutionalism believes that states behaviour is not determined by absolute gains but by relative gains in interaction with other actors on international system. Neo-Functionalism believes in the functional benefits states cooperation. These theories have significant influence on both scholarship and policy-making. These theories generally posit that successful regionalism depends on the extent to which states respond to interdependencies by transferring national sovereignty to regional institutions and governance mechanisms.²⁸ Once this decision is made, spillover effects across policy fields may create incentives to broaden the scope of regional cooperation, and because policy makers are the participants in regional cooperation, they gradually shift their political loyalties from the state/national to the regional level, thereby inducing rising level of regional cooperation and integration.²⁹

Intergovernmentalism Theory

According to this school of thought, international norms do not matter much and nation states remain very protective of their sovereignty, especially in the developing world. This makes any form of deeper international cooperation and community building extremely difficult.³⁰ There are two variants of this theory: (a) Classical Intergovernmentalism-in which the relation between national sovereignty and regional cooperation is usually a trade-off. (b) Instrumentalist Intergovernmentalism- in which it is only under favourable conditions that states commit to regional and international cooperation, namely when a collective solution outweighs the costs of ceding state sovereignty.³¹ Regime-boosting regionalism contains a narrower conceptualisation of the “national interest” compared to liberal intergovernmentalism, both approaches reject the competition between sovereignty and cooperation which are emphasised in neo functionalist and institutionalist theories.³²

²⁷Spendler & Soderbaum (2019); Börzel & Risse, (2016) at 49; Soderbaum & Shaw at 22

²⁸Langenhoven (2011) at 87; Lenz & Marks (2016),

²⁹Spandler & Soderbaum (2019); Burley & Mattli(1993).

³⁰Spandler & Soderbaum (2019) at 18.

³¹Spandler & Soderbaum (2019) at 4.

³²Spandler & Soderbaum (2019) at 4; Acharya (2016); Börzel & Risse (2019).

Diffusion Theory

This theory argues that global action has led to the spread of a “global script” of norms that prescribe transboundary cooperation as an effective solution to many policy challenges. Through diffusion, policy makers adopt similar and mutually compatible ideas about the governance of different policy fields among government elites (e.g. human rights, democracy, governance, environment, security, etcetera) and became less concerned about costs of ceding national sovereignty, which emphasis the intensification of regional cooperation across the world.³³

Realism and Neo-Realism

The basic assumption of realist claims is that international relations should concern itself with national interests and security over ideological or moral concerns³⁴. The international system of states is in constant state of anarchy and “international politics like all politics, is a struggle for power”³⁵. Realism views war and power as “inescapable in a system where sovereign states compete for power and advantage to one another’s detriment”³⁶. The foundations of the realist theory of international politics are traced to the classical accounts of Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes³⁷. Realists claim that there is no actor above the state capable of regulating state interactions³⁸. Realism is against the accumulative regional integration process that would result in loss of state sovereignty.³⁹

Other Variants of Regionalism and Corresponding National Sovereignty Understanding

Other variants or ideal types of regionalism and corresponding national sovereignty understandings are worthy of mention here, namely: (a) Problem-solving regionalism corresponds to instrumental sovereignty notion. This paper is guided by this combination of understanding; (b) Autonomy-oriented regionalism corresponds to principled sovereignty notion; (c) Hollow Regionalism corresponds to status sovereignty notion; (d) Fragile regionalism corresponds to instrumental and principled sovereignty notion; (e) Integrative regionalism corresponds to instrumental and status sovereignty notion, and (f) Regime-boosting regionalism corresponds to status and principled sovereignty notion.⁴⁰

³³Börzel & Van Hullen (2015).

³⁴Mastanduno (1998).

³⁵Morgenthau (1954).

³⁶Booth (1991).

³⁷Barkin (2010) at 3-15.

³⁸Booth (1991),

³⁹Donnelly (2000) at 38.

⁴⁰Spandler & Soderbaum at 6.

Types of Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation/integration takes a number of forms⁴¹, it can come in different forms, shapes and ways as follows:

- i. Free Trade Area – This is the most basic form of economic cooperation, free trade of goods and services, removal of tariffs and quotas within the group.
- ii. Custom Union- free flow of factors of production (capital and labour); common market-represents a complete liberalisation.
- iii. Economic Union – Common market, including the unification of economic policy which in its final phase can lead to the unification of domestic economic policies at the community level;
- iv. Political Union- Involves the gradual transfer of power and legislative authority (parliament, government, jurisprudence, etc.) to the community level. It assumed the establishment of “supranational structures” which can make decisions which are mandatory for all the member states.⁴² There can also be cooperation over transboundary water resources management. Regional cooperation on transboundary waters is a public good that benefits all parties and can open new opportunities for riparian states to sustainably develop their water resources.⁴³ Water is one of the most shared resources on earth. If strategically managed, however, transboundary river-basins can be a source of cooperation.⁴⁴ Transboundary basins account for roughly 60 percent of global fresh water resources. Of 192 countries, 153 share 310 rivers and lakes and 592 aquifers. These water resources serve 2.8 billion people, or 42 percent of the global population.⁴⁵ Modes of regional cooperation are endless. Hence, generally, regional integration can be political, economic, social or cultural.⁴⁶

Globalisation and State Sovereignty

At the centre of globalisation discourse is the notion about the “decline of the state”.⁴⁷ Given the retreat, the requirement of global challenges in different regions of the world will require different state capacities.⁴⁸ Similarly, the process of globalisation, it is argued, has limited the authority of the state to make decision of policy⁴⁹. The challenges raised by globalisation as a process, yield no easy

⁴¹Marinov(2015).

⁴²Di-Fillippo(2005); Tejedor(2017).

⁴³Cooperation over Shared Waters.

⁴⁴The United Nations World Water Development Report 2014; Peterson-Perlman, Veilleux & Wolf (2017).

⁴⁵Transboundary Water Cooperation, Global Water Partnership (GWP)

⁴⁶Olu-Odeyemi & Ayedele (2007) at 214.

⁴⁷Strange(1996).

⁴⁸Notshulwana(2015).

⁴⁹Mishra (1999).

answers. The process of globalisation strains the abilities of states and governments to confront them independently.⁵⁰ According to Bond,⁵¹ “globalisation is a phenomenon that we cannot deny. All we can do is accept it”. Implicit here is the fact that globalisation is here to stay in spite of attacks on it. Globalisation as increased interdependencies among nations.

Supranationalism

One of the major critiques of inter-governmentalism is that it ignores or underestimates the power of supranational institutions and transnational actors in the process of regional integration.⁵²

Supranationalism approach returns the direction of the research back to neo-functional perspective.

By including supranational institutions and a transnational actor, integration is again conceptualised as being self-perpetuating. The primary focus of the supranational approach to regional integration is captured by Haas,⁵³ thus:

political integration is the process whereby political elites in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards the centre, whose institutions possesses or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing nation state

Supranationalism benefits from the work of Lindberg⁵⁴, a prominent example of a supranational institution is the European Union. Unlike members of most international organisations, the member states of the European Union have agreed by treaty to shared sovereignty through institutions of the European Union in some (but by no means all) aspects of government.⁵⁵ While the member states of the European Union are sovereign, the Union partially follows a supranatural system for those functions agreed by treaty to be shared.⁵⁶

Comparative Regionalism

The provision on European Union citizenship in Part Two of the Treaty of Maastricht conferred the rights of free movement and residence, voting in local elections in the country of residence, petition and diplomatic protection on all

⁵⁰Notshulwana (2015) at 88-89.

⁵¹Bond (2000) at 200-320.

⁵²Weiler(2009); Gstohl(2008).

⁵³Haas(1958) at 12-49.

⁵⁴Lindberg (1970).

⁵⁵See The Treaty of European Union (EU), (akaThe Maastricht Treaty 1992) and Treaty on Functioning of the European Union (aka Treaty of Rome 1958), are the two principal Treaties on which the EU is based.

⁵⁶Articles 4 & 5 of Treaty of European Union, akaThe Maastricht Treaty 1992.

citizens of the Union's member states.⁵⁷ It created the position of an ombudsperson, who represents the citizens' interests at community level, constituting supranational actors as legitimate subjects of regional politics, the treaty enhanced and consolidated regional legal order supplementing national constitutions and the inter-state structures of conventional international law.⁵⁸ EU is a supranational body with the community law, European Court of Justice, Common Currency (Euro), European Union Citizenship, EU Parliament, etc. EU is an example of regional integration and indeed a leading and classical example.⁵⁹

Another close example is the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Charter of ASEAN was signed in 2007 to establish ASEAN community and deepen cooperation in politico-security economic and socio-cultural spheres. In the political cooperation ASEAN does political and security dialogue to promote regional peace and stability by enhancing regional resilience.⁶⁰

Regional Cooperation and Integration in Africa

Armed conflict, climate change, trade barriers and lack of respect for human rights are cross-border problems that hinder development in Africa. The economic and political context in African countries is constantly changing. Peoples living conditions and challenges differ between regions, countries and even within individual.⁶¹

A number of initiatives by the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have increased opportunities for economic integration and free trade; better environment & sustainable use of natural resource; strengthened democracy; gender equality and increased respect for human rights etc.⁶²

In 2018 the Free Trade Agreement AfCFTA was launched, to date AfCFTA has been signed by over 50 countries. The agreement is considered to be an important tool to increase regional trade and economic development.⁶³

Allowing the free movement of goods, services, people and capital between national markets, has been a key aspiration of African countries since the achievement of independence some 50 years ago.⁶⁴ Platforms for an eventual monetary union have been set up in East and West Africa.⁶⁵

In Southern Africa, the regional integration grouping is the thirteen-nation Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). It was set up in 1991 as a long term multilateral development project based on cross-border cooperation in

⁵⁷Spandler (2019).

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹European Council, Presidency Conclusions (Special Meeting) Dublin, 28 April, 1990.

⁶⁰Murau & Spandler (2016).

⁶¹Sida-Regional Cooperation in Africa. (2019).

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Kayizzi-Mugewa, Anyarwu & Conceição (2014).

⁶⁵Ibid.

all aspects of the economies and societies of the member states⁶⁶. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a comprehensive programme for the whole continent. Although based on encouraging market forces and foreign investment, it has positive economic, security and governance elements. NEPAD seems to have displaced the established African Economic Community (AEC) programme.⁶⁷

While African Union (AU) is leading overarching efforts to establish continent-wide norms for acceptable political conduct, regional institutions are also contributing substantially to democratisation and peace building in their neighbourhoods.⁶⁸ Bodies such as the Economic Community of West Africa, States (ECOWAS) has been actively managing conflicts and preventing movements towards authoritarianism. Among the Regional Economic Communities (ESC), ECOWAS has been the most effective, with Nigeria serving as a strong anchor and advocate for democratisation and peace keeping. ECOWAS has intervened against, sanctioned and condemned actions taken by most of its member states over the past two decades.⁶⁹ It has organised peaceful resolutions and restored constitutional governments in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, among others.⁷⁰ In West Africa, though ECOWAS is not a supranational entity, its member states enjoy ECOWAS passport visa free movement of persons in the sub-region, it has ECOWAS Parliament⁷¹, ECOWAS Court⁷², an agenda for common market and common currency (with the proposed name ECO)⁷³, joint security (called ECOWAS Joint Border Posts),⁷⁴ among others.

Although other bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and East African Community (EAC) have also organised collective stabilisation efforts and sought to advance democratic governance, they have been less successful.⁷⁵

Obstacles to African Regional Cooperation

There are several challenges to regional cooperation. In the past policies that were anti-market, anti-private sector and anti-foreign investment contributed to Africa's stunted growth. There was also lack of trust and faith in the cooperation or integration process, such that countries were unwilling to yield sovereignty to a

⁶⁶Keet (2004).

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Khadiagala (2018).

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Established under Articles 6 and 13 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993, ECOWAS Parliament is a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus for representatives of the people of West Africa. The current speaker of the Parliament is His Excellency Sidie Muhammed Tunis from Sierra-Leone. Available online at <https://www.parl.ecowas.int>

⁷²Established under Articles 6 and 15 of the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS 1993, founded in 2001, located in Abuja, Nigeria.

⁷³CNN (2019).

⁷⁴ECOWAS-(2018).

⁷⁵Ibid.

supranational regional body⁷⁶. The concept of sovereignty constitutes a major challenge to regional integration in Africa. The idea of sovereignty is associated with the preservation of national identity.⁷⁷ Adherence to sovereignty is very strong. Weak infrastructures constitutes another challenge, most African countries are characterised by deficiencies and poor infrastructures.⁷⁸ These have posed serious challenges to regional integration and development process. Weak institutions – the institutions of most of the regional institutions are weak. Human resources capacity is inadequate for efficient running of the institutions. The institutions do not have the manpower for technical studies and implementation of measures on integration and development. Other challenges are weak implementation of protocols that are addressed to specific integrative measures and deepen integration.⁷⁹ Multiplicity of regional economic cooperations and integration in the region with the attendant overlapping membership by countries, also constitute a challenge.

Also, integration agenda in Africa is rendered extremely complex due to the multiplication of processes. Another challenge is the lack of trade complimentarity among African countries, with most exports focussing on extractive industry or agricultural commodities, which implies that the natural markets for Africa are often external to the continent.⁸⁰ Apart from ECOWAS, regional bodies often lack strong champions for democratic norms. Both SAD and EAC tolerate authoritarian members and have witnessed the erosion of democracy in potential anchor states like South Africa and Kenya.⁸¹ Regional institutions are unable to fulfil their core mandated largely because they are underfunded by global standard and tend to lack common identities or share value.⁸² Finance or funding is an important determinant of the process of regional integration. Contributions from member states are either irregular or in arrears, which implies that operational and program activities of these institutions are being compromised.⁸³ Little cooperation among the regional economic cooperation occurs. Several of them such as the Arab Maghreb Union and Economic Community of Central African States, show minimum interest in democratisation and peace building.⁸⁴

In most African regions where states face long-running conflicts and politicians are fearful of relinquishing sovereignty, progress towards integration and multilateralism is limited.⁸⁵ Political instability is another main challenge to African regional integration. Not all countries enjoy political stability, rather, repeated civil disorder and war have been the feature of Africa which severely disrupt regional cooperational integration. Enduring solutions to Africa's Security and Political problems will require placing regional institutions at the centre of

⁷⁶Qobo (2007).

⁷⁷Olaniyan(2008).

⁷⁸Ibid

⁷⁹Ibid

⁸⁰ICTSD (2016). See Olu-Odeyemi & Ayodele (2017); Melo & Tsikata (2014).

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Olaniyan (2008).

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

stabilisation efforts. But they cannot play a leading role without further buying from individual states and renewed international engagement. In addition to infrastructural development, trade facilitation, and peacekeeping, external actors need to invest in ideas, activities and programmes that foster linkages among African States.⁸⁶

Africa indeed has a long tradition of regional cooperation, its trade and monetary integration schemes being the oldest in the developing world.⁸⁷ African states therefore need to keep pressing forward in the overall interest of the continent.

Rationale for Regional Cooperation

There are several reasons for regional cooperation, some of them are itemised below:⁸⁸

- a. Governments wish to bind themselves to better policies, including democracy and to signal such bindings to domestic and foreign investors.
- b. A desire to obtain more secure access to major market
- c. The pressures of globalisation forcing firms and countries to seek efficiency through larger markets, increased competition, and access to foreign technologies and investment.
- d. Governments' desire to maintain sovereignty by pooling it with others in areas of economic management where most nation-states are too small to act alone.
- e. A desire to jog the multilateral system into faster and deeper action in selected areas.
- f. A desire to help neighbouring countries stabilises and prosper.⁸⁹

Impacts of Regional Cooperation on the Cooperating States

Regionalism or regional cooperation has several impacts on the states involved. While some are positive, others are negative.

Positive Impacts of Regional Cooperation

Joining a regional integration agreement necessarily requires surrendering some immediate control over policy making and losing some political autonomy. Some regional cooperation, however, goes deeper than that and create institutions for joint decision making. For instance, as the EU's integration has deepened, decision making has increasingly moved away from national capitals to Brussels

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Metzger (2008).

⁸⁸Farida (2015); See Schiff (2003) and Anwar (2000).

⁸⁹Farida (2015).

and much of the current debate is shaped by the belief that some form of political unification must eventually follow the creation of an integrated economic unit.⁹⁰ By pooling sovereignty, members of a regional integration agreement may be able to preserve and enlarge it and thus strengthen themselves by creating a united front against external pressures or by joining forces in international negotiations.⁹¹

Besides that, regional cooperation can strengthen the voices of all small or weak nations. These small countries often face severe disadvantages in dealing with the rest of the world because of their low bargaining power and high negotiation costs.⁹² Regional economic cooperation rests on the premise that some sovereignty is best exercised at the regional level. In the language of economics, this is because the action of one economy can produce externalities that affect others particularly as neighbouring economies grow closely connected. Some democratic societies (including Japan, not to mention Greece) have proven to be totally incapable of providently exercising sovereignty over fiscal policy at the national level, by being too ready to spend but too reluctant to tax. For them, some loss of sovereignty would be a good thing.

The regional integration also can accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of nations⁹³.

The regional integration promote regional peace and stability through abiding or everlasting respect for justice and rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region.

A country with a higher economic rate will have more power and authority than other member states. It can increase competition in tradeable goods sector, so also increased competition may induce improvements in efficiency, and a larger demand for inputs in those sectors, further increasing the relative demand for capital. Another impact is that there will be trade globalisation (free-trade area) among members.⁹⁴ Regional cooperation and integration expands markets, inputs resources beyond national boundaries, better allocation of resources across the region and accelerating economic growth. It appears to reduce income inequality between countries.⁹⁵

Risk sharing is another possible benefit of regional integration. Intuitively more risk sharing through cooperation or integration makes sense. Regional cooperation can help resolve the problems of trust, expertise and financing.⁹⁶

There is a considerable body of literature on the impact of regional cooperation on prosperity and political stability.⁹⁷ Regional cooperation and integration enhances political cooperation, leads to political and security dialogue which having the aim to promote regional peace and stability by enhancing

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ben-David (2001).

⁹⁶Maurice & Winters (2012).

⁹⁷Strachan (2018).

regional resilience,⁹⁸ which is achievable by cooperating in all fields based on the principles of self-confidence, self-reliance, mutual respect, cooperation and solidarity as foundation for a strong and viable community of nations.⁹⁹

Negative Impacts of Regional Cooperation

On the contrary, cooperation among countries can lead to competition for power. This can impact negatively on poor country as a member. Even though they have natural resources in sufficiency, yet they cannot compete favourably with richer countries. It tends to increase inequality within countries. When nations join with others in a trade or political bloc, they give up some national sovereignty. EU started out as a free trade zone and built considerable political integration over a period of several decades. However, EU is far from a united community of states, and far from a satisfactory Europe-wide democratic order. These regional or global groupings erode national democracy while offering diminished accountability at a wider policy-making level.¹⁰⁰

The unfolding Euro crisis (BREXIT) makes clear the difficulty of managing a single monetary policy among a group of countries that retain separate fiscal policies and regulatory frameworks over national banking system. In order to save the Euro, in December 2011, European leaders agreed to impose binding limits on national budgets and borrowing, with penalties for those who violate them. The only EU member to reject the deal was the United Kingdom, which, in so doing, highlighted what most people do not always appreciate about the nature of any regional economic cooperation.¹⁰¹ When defending his decision on BREXIT (i.e. Britain exiting EU), the then British Prime Minister- David Cameron characterised the proposed Europe Treaty as tantamount to the loss of sovereignty. In an ensuing parliamentary debate, he also claimed to be protecting the British national interest.¹⁰² One should however not be deceived into thinking that sovereignty and national interest are the same thing.¹⁰³ The phrase “give me liberty or give me death”, famously uttered by Patrick Henry prior to the American Revolution, may have been good war-time rhetoric but it cannot serve as a sensible guide to peace-time economic decision making. Which is better, to live free but impoverished, or to prosper but with some limitations on freedom?

A related question is, how could retaining sovereignty be in the national interest if it makes the country works off?¹⁰⁴ Britain had already given up considerable sovereignty by being a member of the EU. Regional economic cooperation rests on the premise that some sovereignty is best exercised at the regional level. Europe has been a model of regional economic cooperation to which other regions, like Asia and Africa, look for inspiration. Its approach was to create regional institution to which member states yield sovereignty in specific

⁹⁸Farida (2015).

⁹⁹Rachman, Khan & Sadique (2020).

¹⁰⁰Political Integration and National Sovereignty (2012).

¹⁰¹Takagi (2012).

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

areas. But strengthening of sovereignty at the supranational level (supranationalism) is counterbalanced by parallel principle of inter-governmentalism, allowing each sovereign member state to veto a decision to move supranationalism a step further.¹⁰⁵ The Euro crisis has revealed how inept Europe's supranational institutions are in dealing with a regional problem of this proportion. Instead, inter-governmentalism is currently at the centre stage as the mechanism for conflict management.

Conclusion

This paper has examined and shed light on some grey areas of regional cooperation. Before states negotiate or enter into regional cooperation they need to take a balanced look at various facets of regional integration and do a comparative analysis of regionalism (comparative regionalism), by gauging both benefits and costs carefully in evaluating suitable proposals for regional cooperation and integration to be adopted.

The regional cooperation varies from region to region depending on the drivers or theories guiding each cooperation. Regardless of the type of regionalism adopted the overall aim of regional integration/cooperation initiative, like any developmental agenda, is to boost prosperity, welfare, reduce poverty and inequality, boost democratic governance, security and infrastructural development. Welfare is the ultimate goal like any policy or strategy, the goal of integration must be an improvement of welfare and quality of life- especially the largest segment of the society.

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