



# ATLANTIC FUTURE

## WORKING PAPER

22

### Regional and Interregional Interactions in Europe, North America and across the North Atlantic

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This paper represents the views of the author in his individual capacity, and does not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of State..

#### ABSTRACT

If we figured regionalism as a continuum from rudimentary regional interaction to very sophisticated forms of it, Europe stands on this latter end while North America barely makes it to the middle point. The imbalance in the degree of regionalization on the two northern shores of the Atlantic explains the non-existent region-to-region interaction. Interregionalism has thus little to say about Europe and North America, although 'quasi-interregionalism' (i.e. country-region relations) has here some of its most advanced manifestations. The case of US-Europe relations actually goes beyond quasi-interregionalism and displays traits that are more characteristic of regionalism than anything else. A comparison of regionalism in Europe and North America is therefore invariably destined to be an exercise involving a third, bicontinental region: the West.

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## 1. Introduction

Regionalism can be generally understood as the process by which a group of states define rules of interaction that set them apart from other countries. In the history of modern regionalism, the experiences of Europe and North America stand out each in their own way.

In no other part of the world has regionalism been experimented on such a scale and with comparable intensity as in Europe. Of the many regional organizations that the Old Continent hosts, the most important by far is the European Union (EU). Such is the extraordinariness of the EU that scholars refer to it as a *sui generis* organization (Rosamond 2000) for the lack of any more suitable and universally accepted definition. The uniqueness of the EU lies of course in its unprecedented blending – at least in modern times – of supranational and intergovernmental decision- and policy-making.

North America, including the United States (US), Canada and Mexico, has followed a more conservative intergovernmental path. North American regionalism remains nonetheless a special case because it is invariably affected by the status as global superpower of the US.

Europe and North America are also an exceptional case of region-to-region relations, which unfold less on an interregional level than they do in a bicontinental regional setting, alternatively called the (North) Atlantic community or, more often, the West, partly institutionalized in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Our purpose in this paper is to look at the European and North American experiences in regionalism in a comparative fashion. We extend the comparative approach to the Atlantic space insofar as its specificities can be better conceptualized in regional rather than interregional terms.

## 2. An Analytical Framework to Compare Regions

Regions are an elusive entity. In empirical terms, they may designate a geographical area, an economic zone, a political space, an administrative unit, or even an area characterised by relative homogeneity in ethnic or religious terms. In theoretical terms, the concept of region can alternatively be used to indicate an area defined by the overlapping ranges of action of certain states, treat multiple states as a more or less unitary entity, or identify a level of governance between the state and the international multilateral system.<sup>1</sup> Because the term offers such rich concepts both empirically and theoretically, a comparison between them should be based on a comprehensive analytical framework. This is especially needed when the analysis includes Europe, whose *sui generis* form of regionalism often makes it an intractable term of comparison. We strive to establish a baseline with which the very different experiences with regionalism of Europe and North America can be meaningfully compared and the '*sui generis* trap' avoided. Heavily drawing from the most recent literature on regionalism, we delineate such a framework as a set of five parameters.

The first one concerns the *functions that regionalism performs*. According to Luk Van Langenhove (2012: 20-21), regions complement or supplement states in the exercise

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of region, as it defines a separate level of governance, is applicable to subnational governance too (Van Langenhove 2012: 18).

of three fundamental state functions: delimit and regulate a common market; provide public goods; exert sovereign authority over individuals and vis-à-vis other states.

The *drivers of regionalization* are our second parameter. States engage in regionalism for a variety of reasons, ranging from strategic considerations regarding their security and power, to calculations about their material well-being, to the ambition to lend a political dimension to what they perceive as a community of nations that share an historical legacy as well as values and norms. Motivations of a different nature can, of course, co-exist and actually mutually reinforce each other.

Our third parameter is the *degree of 'regionness'* achieved by Europe, North America and the North Atlantic. We borrow the term 'regionness' from Björn Hettne (2014: 56) to indicate the degree to which regions have acquired internal cohesion, including in terms of regional identity (ibidem: 56-57). Regions move up and down the 'regionness' scale depending on how states have addressed the security dilemma (in broad terms, whether their relations are more competitive or more cooperative)<sup>2</sup>; how homogeneous their economic systems are (which imply a lesser or greater mobility of goods and capitals, but also labour and people); and whether the governance regimes under which they operate are convergent (ibidem: 61-62).

The fourth parameter regards the capacity of regions to *structure the international system*. Certain regions have 'actorness, i.e. the capacity to act in a purposive and organized fashion. Other regions stop short of having a purposive actorness and yet perform a structuring function over international relations (they have an 'impersonal' actorness, so to speak). Following Hurrell (2007: 136-141), we distinguish four ways in which regionalism structures the international system.

First is the capacity of a region to embody a cultural specificity that reverberates into the world. Regions can provide for a larger (but also looser) cultural horizon in which the cultural specificity of a nation state is less exposed to degradation because it is made part of a larger, culturally pluralist entity.

Secondly, regions structure international relations as organizational mechanisms between national and the multilateral levels. Here a degree of institutionalization of regional relations is evidently implied, albeit not necessarily a strong actorship.

Thirdly, regions structure international relations insofar as they act as powers or 'poles' Hurrell (2007: 139), which implies a higher degree of actorness still. As such, regions are cohesive blocs that impinge on the global constellation of power.

Fourthly and lastly, regionalism contributes to structuring international relations through organizing interstate relations according to behavioural patterns not reducible to state-based multilateral interaction (Hettne 2014: 57; Baert et al. 2014: 181). In region-based multilateralism the emphasis is on collective management of transnational challenges, which implies a relaxation (although by no means the relinquishment) of sovereignty-determined behavioural patterns. Regional multilateralism relies on structured dialogue, consensus-based decision-making and tested practices of interaction.

The last parameter we use concerns the *disintegrating potential of regions*. The experiments in regionalism undertaken by Europe and North America are not invulnerable to regressive dynamics. For the most part, these dynamics are the flip-

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on the security dilemma is vast. We broadly follow Alexander Wendt's understanding of it as a social construction resulting from the intersubjective understanding of states rather than an objective state of reality that reflects the supposedly invariable anarchic nature of international relations (Wendt 1997: 397; see also Wendt 1999).

side of the regionalization drivers. But there are also disaggregating factors that are not directly related to the causes of regionalism, like for instance an over-reliance on elites (Fioramonti 2012: 158; and 2014: 225 and ff.).

In the following sections, we apply these five broad criteria to better appreciate the specificities of each instance of regionalism.

### **3. Regionalism in Europe and North America**

#### **3.1 Functions of Regionalism in Europe and North America**

Europe's involvement in regionalism has been so radical that scholars prefer the term 'integration' to highlight it (Rosamund 2000). Regional institutions provide for a highly integrated common economic space, they allot resources for the promotion of public goods, and they exert – within certain limits – authority over states and citizens while relating to external actors as a sovereign or semi-sovereign entity. The EU and the regimes inbuilt in it, such as the Schengen agreement for the free movement of people (to highlight one example), perform almost the entirety of the functions outlined above. The exception is the European Court on Human Rights (ECtHR), which has exerted supranational jurisdiction over the states party to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) since 1959.

The single market performs most functions associated with a common economic space, with a majority of EU member states even sharing the same currency. The Union has expanded its competencies over time, to the extent that it now has at least a say on most policy areas. With more competencies has come greater latitude for providing public goods. Subsidies to farmers now only absorb a fraction of the financial resources that the EU also spends on poor regions in EU countries, assistance to small and medium enterprises, research, education and culture, international aid.<sup>3</sup> From the start, European integration has entailed a degree of supranational decision-making (which has also expanded its range) and communitarian institutions such as the European Parliament, Commission and Court of Justice (ECJ), which has long established the supremacy of EU law over national law.

Nothing of the sort exists in North America. The negotiation and ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 defined a common economic space encompassing the US, Canada and Mexico. This free trade area has remained the sole common economic space in North America. There have been no mainstream demands for a customs union or single market, and certainly no calls for an evolution into political union. North American regionalists have made a conscious decision to leave most of the provisions of public goods to the sovereign governments (there are no cross-border subsidies). There are exceptions, such as the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), a bilateral agreement between Canada and the US for provision of national aerospace defence, or the North American Development Bank (NDB), a US-Mexican-funded bank tasked with supporting infrastructure projects on both sides of the US-Mexico border. But they take place according to ad hoc negotiated arrangements and have no regional dimension (Graham 1997: 128).

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<sup>3</sup>Data on the EU budget breakdown is available on the website of the European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/budget/figures/2014/2014\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/figures/2014/2014_en.cfm). For a simpler guide into the specific items covered by the various headings, see <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/nov/22/eu-budget-spending-contributions-european-union>. Retrieved in 3 July 2015.

Finally, in North America, there is nothing that supersedes national law. NAFTA contains several dispute resolution mechanisms, but they are mostly technical in nature, advisory and non-binding. Most disputes between investors under NAFTA are outsourced to the World Bank for legal resolution, same as in other regional economic groupings. .

### 3.2 Regionalization Drivers

International Relations (IR) theorists have variously explained the European integration process by focusing on its historical origins and, even more so, on the causes underlying its sustainability (Wiener and Diez 2009).

Scholars in the realist and intergovernmentalist camps point to the compatibility or commonality of national interests as the factor that keeps the EU boat afloat. They differ, however, on the type interests that explain states' choice for integration (Pollack 2012). Realism provides a monocausal explanation based on power politics, and particularly on the combined desire of (West) Germany and France to balance each other while simultaneously counterbalancing against external powers, most notably the Soviet Union (Rosato 2011). Liberal intergovernmentalists argue that economic issues, shaped into national preferences by powerful domestic constituencies, bear a greater responsibility for initiating and sustaining European integration (Moravcsik 1993). The latter has been consequently conceptualized as a constant bargaining exercise (Moravcsik 1998). While the bargaining takes place in a cooperative context, it offers member states the chance to leverage their relative economic power against one another, which accounts for the importance of France and Germany (and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom) in determining the pace of integration.

Theorists looking beyond the national interest implicitly assume that the causes of European integration are not necessarily the same as the causes of its sustainability. They admit that commonality of interests is a *sine qua non* for European integration. Yet they also contend that such commonality is not only the cause of integration but also its upshot, due to the transformative action of EU institutions (Pollack 2009). Member states find it advantageous to frame their preferences in European terms because EU bodies perform certain functions more effectively than individual states, notably reducing transactional costs, information sharing, the monitoring of agreements and stabilization of expectations of other states' behaviour (Keohane 1993). Neo-functionalists maintain that, European integration has created a self-sustaining dynamic of institutionalization through the combined effect of transnational flows, policy spillovers – whereby integration in one area invariably produces the demand for integration in related areas – and socialization processes among EU policymakers and interest groups (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1997). Others argue that European integration would not have been sustainable if member states' interests had not been mediated by a sense of common belonging enshrined not only in a shared past but most importantly in shared values, norms and ultimately identity (Christiansen et al. 2001).

Hence, in spite of its vastness and diversity, European integration literature has produced some conventional wisdom: the process has multiple causes; ideational factors are involved; the border between agency-related and systemic drivers of regionalization is blurred. How does North America fare in comparison?

Most theorists cite a monocausal nature of North America's regionalism, in that the effort has been driven by economic interests. North American economic integration, which reached its zenith with NAFTA, has been interpreted as a result of a combination of interest group pressure (from business groups and economic ideologues in favour of free trade) and systemic pressures such as competition from rising economies as well

as an increasingly integrated and enlarging EU (Hufbauer 2004: 41). This combination proved effective in persuading the US government, the key player in the negotiation, to bring the project to conclusion.

At the time of the NAFTA negotiation, no serious effort was made to think of a more ambitious form of integration (Graham 1997: 126). Now, however, some policymakers and scholars are advocating for the creation of a North American political body (Pastor 2005: 11). They argue that institutions need to catch-up with the new reality of a pluralist democratic Mexico – where political space in the 2000s opened up beyond the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) – and the need for a strengthened North American bloc to face competition from Asia. While recent North American Leaders Summit (NALS) meetings have begun exploring the idea, it is too early to tell how permanent and deep these ideational elements of democracy, free trade and market-based economics run.

### 3.3 Up and Down the Regionness Scale

As noted above, regions move up and down the scale of ‘regionness,’ –measuring their political and economic cohesion, depending on whether 1) intra-regional relations are competitive or not; 2) the regional economy is homogeneous; and 3) the political regimes of regional states are convergent.

Europe fares well in all respects. While scholars argue about the ultimate causes of integration and its sustainability, they do agree that European countries have long ceased to perceive each other as a threat and appear to have overcome the trap of the security dilemma. Intra-EU relations are inherently cooperative and even if national security remains a sovereign matter, intra-EU borders no longer have any defence relevance.

Europe’s economy has also achieved a remarkable level of homogeneity. Macroeconomic indicators vary considerably in EU countries; and so does the industrial base, the business environment and many other elements that make up an economic system. Yet, the development of the single market and, even more so, the establishment of a currency union have over time narrowed the room for national economic policymakers to deviate from established economic discourses and practices (Hettne 2007: 61-62). The EU stands for free trade, welfare benefits, extensive regulation and increasingly for fiscal consolidation and low inflation. The European Central Bank (ECB) is legally bound to keep inflation under control, while member states are under a complex web of legal commitments to exert budgetary restraint.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, Europe is characterized by a high degree of regime convergence. All EU member states, and most of the other European countries, are liberal democracies espousing pluralist party systems. They also share a huge corpus of law – the so-called *acquis communautaire* – as well as a wide range of common rules and established practices. All this puts Europe firmly into the top spot of the regionness scale (which Hettne calls *regional polity*; Hettne 2014: 57).

What about North America? The North American historical record with war has led to a largely bilateral, rather than regional, accommodation of the security dilemma. While intra-North American security relations are increasingly cooperative, only in the US-

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<sup>4</sup> All 28 EU member states must comply with the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), which obligates them to keep budget deficits under a 3% threshold and public debt at 60%. The various mechanisms to manage the sovereign debt crisis vary not only in terms of content but also in terms of membership: they apply to all countries using the Euro, but participation of non-Eurozone states varies (Emerson and Giovannini 2014: 47-51).

Canada case do borders have no security relevance. The US-Mexico security relationship is fraught with concerns over illegal migration (from Mexico to the US) and historical conquest (the US taking almost half of Mexican territory after the 1846-48 Mexican-American War). This does not mean that the security dilemma dominates political and social life between these two countries, just that it has not been completely overcome. Relations are governed by stable frameworks with an increasing number of institutionalized forums, at varying levels, to settle disputes (i.e. the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Border Management Executive Steering Committee, the Binational group on Bridges and Border Crossings, 'sister city' Border Liaison Mechanisms, etc). International law and social norms make it inconceivable that either country would use violence to settle a dispute, but for Mexico and the US the border still remains relevant in security terms.

In recent years North America has come closer in terms of political regimes, with a truly pluralist party system finally taking roots in Mexico. Finally, North America has recorded an increasing convergence of economic policy thanks to NAFTA, though Mexico remains more statist than either Canada or the US (Tornell 1997: 26). However, since NAFTA is a free trade agreement and not a monetary or fiscal union, macro-economic policy has not become nearly as homogenous as it has in Europe.

North America is defined by mutual recognition and an established cooperative security structure resting on converging economies. Nonetheless, regional relations are still governed at a largely bilateral level without supranational institutionalism. This makes North America a highly advanced *regional society*, but not yet truly a regional community (Hettne 2014: 57).

### **3.4 Structuring International Relations – Europe, North America and the 'Wider' World**

Both Europe and North America occupy an important place in the world because of their geographical, demographic and above all economic size. To use Hettne's term (ibidem: 59), they have a considerable 'presence', a pre-condition for having a powerful structuring capacity of international relations.

So long as ideas about individual rights, state-citizens relations and the role of religion contribute to defining the cultural specificity of a region, it is the West, that is, a larger bi-continental community, rather than Europe or North America per se that contributes the most to articulating pluralism. While Europe and North America do share a 'Western' cultural background, however, they espouse traits that mark them out not only vis-à-vis the rest of the world, but between themselves (Kagan 2003; Rifkin 2004).

In Europe, North America – more accurately the US – is perceived both as the complement to the West and as the 'significant other' in opposition to a contemporary European-only identity. The EU is generally singled out as the political locus wherein such an identity can be transplanted, further developed and projected internationally (Leonard 2005). European integration is premised on the idea that pluralism – of religion, language and historical tradition – is no insuperable impediment to the establishment of viable regional frameworks, and that diversity can co-exist with unity. In these terms, the international system's cultural diversity is today articulated more by a *European* cultural specificity rather than, say, an Italian, German or French one. The contours of such specificity delimit a broad political-cultural agenda based on a preference for dialogue and multilateral cooperation, a strong emphasis on environmental protection and sustainable development, and cosmopolitanism (Habermas and Derrida 2003).

North America has not developed a comparable sense of its own self as the bearer of a region-wide cultural specificity. Yet this does not mean there is no such a sense at all.

To a varying degree, US, Canadian and Mexican societies embrace the same idea of pluralism in defining their own culture, most notably in the US, whose origin myth is built around the idea of a 'cultural melting pot' (Kazal 1995: 438). The ideological battles throughout the region, while taking place in a unique local context, are centred on roughly the same lines. Therefore, while there is no distinctly *North American* cultural identity per se, some of the individual characteristics of each individual country's identity are shared regionally.

Regions, shape international relations also because they are a governance mechanism placed in-between the national and multilateral levels.

The main avenue along which the EU performs a mid-level governance function runs between the EU and the United Nations (UN). Relations between the two have gone through a profound transformation since the 1990s, largely reflecting the institutionalization of European cooperation in security and defence matters as well as the UN's growing focus on peace-keeping and peace-building (Novosseloff 2012: 167). EU-UN cooperation has taken the form of delegation, whereby the EU has conducted military or civilian missions abroad under a UN Security Council (UNSC) mandate or in support of local UN efforts (Tull 2012: 135-139; Novosseloff 2012: 150-161). At the same time, the EU has focused on the UN in the attempt to shape the global agenda on issues such as non-proliferation or the fight against climate change in line with its own preferences (although with mixed results; Pirozzi 2012: 103-108). The EU also provides oversight and enforcement of multilaterally agreed-upon rules. For example, the EU's climate change policy is in line with UN agreed provisos, amongst others. Other European regional bodies perform a loosely comparable 'policing' function (Hurrell 2007: 142) too. The ECtHR sanctions violations of the ECHR, which is a historical by-product of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). Here, a regional body complements a multilateral (global) regime in that it contributes to upholding its provisions, even if indirectly. In sum, the claim that regions operate as mid-level governance mechanisms would sound hollow were it not for the EU and other forms of European regionalism.

In North America, the situation is more complicated. No regional body exists with the authority to adjudicate on human rights issues. The US and Canada are not even part of the American Convention on Human Rights (comprising the Americas and the Caribbean), even though they are often supportive of the goals and both fund the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Despite some elite pressure usually manifesting itself around the annual NALS summit, there is no common foreign or security policy for North America. Unlike the EU, there is no 'North American Caucus' in the UN.

Mid-level governance from the region is mostly confined to the economic sphere. NAFTA follows World Trade Organization (WTO) provisions and the current Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations between the US and a number of Pacific countries also aim to strengthen these norms in places where they are currently lacking (Cooper 2014: 3,6). Through this drawing of regional norms embodied in NAFTA from the multilateral level North America as a region helps shape international relations.

We further assume regions to be, potentially, 'poles' that contribute to defining the international constellation of power. European regionalism lends credibility to this claim, though not in the one respect of which power is generally assumed to consist, i.e. political-military power. Whatever progress the EU has made in the framework of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it remains a distant cry from being a credible, let alone single, military entity (Nuttall 2000; Merlingen and Ostrauskaite 2006; Howorth 2014; Menon 2014).

As long as EU foreign policy remains in the hands of the member states, the EU will always fail the 'great power' test (Zielonka 1998). Vague dreams of federal unity notwithstanding, the Union was never really meant to become a great power. Instead, one of its goals was to serve as an instrument for its member states to expand their international influence (Hill 1998; Manners and Whitman 2000). To its small member states, the Union offers an additional layer of protection and a say on matters on which they would otherwise have little or no control. It provides the larger member states with a means to organize consensus and orientate EU foreign policy in a direction in line with their preferences (Gegout 2000; Schwegmann 2000; Hill 2004; Jennings 2005).

Coupled with the weight it collectively exerts in other policy areas, the EU has indeed emerged as one of the 'poles' around which today's international relations revolve (Hill and Smith 2005). The case of trade is telling. The EU speaks for the largest trade bloc in the world, which lends it the capacity to compel countries desiring access to the common market to abide by EU-set standards and rules; so much so that the Union has been defined a 'regulatory power' (Robberecht 2013). Furthermore, thanks to its considerable negotiating power the EU has often tipped the scales in concluding multilateral agreements and has more than once proved decisive for their entry into force – notable examples include the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC), the anti-personnel land mine treaty and the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions limits.

In contrast with the European case, regionalism in North America can in no way be conceived in 'polar' terms. The reason is simple: the lack of any incentive for the US to set up regional institutions to which 'polar' functions could be transferred. While individual European countries relinquish some of their individual sovereignty to the EU in hopes of Europe gaining more power, for the US any transfer of power from the US to a North American body would result in a reduction of its ability to function as a global pole. This is not to say that the US has no interest whatsoever in exerting its power through regionally defined alliances and partnerships. But North America is not the locus wherein this takes place. That locus is instead the 'Atlantic community', or the West, which does behave as a unitary 'pole' insofar as it is a bloc resting on US hegemony.

Our final sub-criterion to compare the capacity of regionalism to shape international relations relates to the ability to present viable alternatives to state-based relations. At first sight, Europe stands out again as a testament to the transformative potential of regionalism. The EU has produced a corpus of law that has long transcended international law. It relies on a system of multilevel governance which is far more advanced and complex than any other interstate relationship. And it has permanently changed the balance between rules and power, so that sheer military power plays no role in determining the outcome of intra-EU processes (Hurrell 2007: 143).

The notion that the EU has not only set a pattern of regional integration, but has acquired a paradigmatic status, has become a common understanding (Hettne 2014: 62). However, the EU's transformative potential has remained largely unexpressed. There is scant empirical evidence that European integration has changed the structure of international relations. Post-modern Europe has remained an isolated case in a world in which states continue to be overly dominant over regions. The EU is a unique part of the international system but has not triggered a change towards a regionalization of world politics along the integrationist pattern Europe has been following in the last sixty-odd years.

North American regionalism has been moulded in accordance with the liberal notion of international cooperation and norm-setting. Regional arrangements have been created in trade and investment, immigration and environmental protection. Lacking any form of

supranational authority, the logic according to which regional integration would naturally proceed from functional spillovers from one policy area into another has never kicked in. But the liberal logic of absolute gains has played out powerfully, to the extent that North America's landscape is one in which rules can constrain power in regional interactions where key national interests are at stake.

### 3.5 Disintegration risks

Neither Europe nor North America have experienced disintegration. There has been no significant reduction in the range of joint policies, no decrease in membership and no handover of powers back to individual states ( Webber 2013: 343).

Yet, European integration is in the midst of a very difficult phase, with the prospect of at least partial disaggregation looking more plausible.

One cause of Europe's difficulty lies in the chain reaction triggered by the 2007-08 Great Recession and the ensuing sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone. Lacking any control over their own monetary policy, Eurozone countries with troubled finances have found themselves entirely dependent on the goodwill of financially more solid Eurozone partners to bail them out. Championed by Germany, these countries have agreed to provide assistance on the condition that beneficiary countries pursue a policy of severe budgetary restraint. The cuts to public spending have exacerbated the recessionary environment in which most Southern European countries have languished since 2008, with basic macroeconomic data such as growth and employment rates continuing their downward turn. Greece, in particular, is experiencing a debt calamity of historic proportions that can result in its leaving the Eurozone, and perhaps even the EU.

The Union and its most daring progress, the euro, have consequently turned into a target of widespread popular discontent. This has happened both in debtor countries, where the public (rightly) feels that their political autonomy is massively constrained by the creditor countries, and in the creditor countries themselves, where a growing section of the population perceive EU institutions as an instrument to transfer wealth to fiscally irresponsible states. As a result, the EU is now increasingly perceived as a distant, opaque decision-making machine run by unaccountable elites.

The vanishing of a vastly benign domestic environment for integration policies is an historical novelty that is making supporters of the European project fear the worst (Webber 2013: 352-53). There are reasons to believe, however, that EU countries will stick together and keep the Eurozone afloat. The costs of intra-Eurozone readjustment, even if carried out according to an austerity-driven pattern, are less than the costs that a breakup of the Eurozone, partial would entail for both debtor and creditor countries (Leblond 2012: 62).

Partial disintegration is a possibility not only as far Greece is concerned. It is also linked to the prospective referendum on the continued EU membership of the United Kingdom (UK). If the referendum is held and results in a British withdrawal, EU membership will have diminished for the first time, and the option of withdrawal will acquire greater legitimacy. If, on the contrary, the British electorate votes for staying with significant powers repatriated to the UK alone or all member states, undiminished membership would come at the cost of greater disarticulation of the EU's governance system or an unprecedented roll-back of EU competencies.

European integration is vulnerable to regression ultimately because it has advanced very far. With the economies of EU member states more dependent on the well-functioning of the Union, and more and more decisions taken at the EU level, regionalism in Europe has irreversibly acquired a political dimension that will make it susceptible to the oscillations of public opinion. In contrast, the relatively modest

progress of regionalism in North America is a guarantee of its sustainability. Given the interlocking financial and economic systems in North America, the region can either retain the status quo or increase integration. Despite occasional outcries from the far left in the US and the far right in Mexico, there is no real possibility of disaggregation of NAFTA.

## 4. The West: More Region than Interregional Space

In the extant literature, interregionalism is a contested concept. Baert, Scaramagli and Söderbaum (2014: 4-6) distinguish ‘pure’ interregionalism involving regional organizations from more spurious forms of region-to-region contacts. None of these, however, fits the North Atlantic case. North Atlantic relations unfold in two dimensions: state-to-region, e.g. EU-Canada and EU-Mexico relations, both of which have recently been upgraded thanks to formal free trade agreements<sup>5</sup>; and bi-continental regionalization in the framework of NATO and EU-US relations, particularly if the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is eventually agreed and ratified. State-to-region relations are an extreme form of spurious interregionalism, which Baert, Scaramagli and Söderbaum call ‘quasi-interregionalism’ and most experts exclude from the interregionalism taxonomy altogether (Doidge 2014: 37). The latter, bicontinental regionalization, pertains to regionalism rather than interregionalism.

Transatlantic or North Atlantic relations – terms generally used as alternative to ‘US-European’ relations (although Canada is often included too) – are in fact usually referred to as if they were a unitary entity, the ‘West’. This term is generally accepted in the literature and commonly used in official statements and by the media. While other historically Anglophone countries outside the North Atlantic, such as Australia and New Zealand, are often included in the “West” and are part of the mostly Western Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), they do not drive the West to any degree like the North Atlantic does. Measured against our parameters, not only do transatlantic relations exhibit traits typical of regions, but come out as a relatively cohesive region. The West is thus more a region than an interregional space. This in turn makes it possible to compare the West to European and North American experiences in regionalization as a further, and unique, form of regionalism.

### 4.1 Functions of Western Regionalism

No Western structure exists to provide a common economic space, public goods or jurisdiction over citizens and states. Nevertheless, Western regionalism does perform certain state functions, and thus the criterion remains pertinent.

EU and US economies, while not formally integrated, have achieved a considerable degree of mutual interpenetration (Hamilton and Quinlan 2014). Exchanges between transatlantic economic policymakers, operators and regulators take place on a regular basis, sometimes through institutionalized settings such as the EU-US Transatlantic Economic Council. The routinization of these practices has gone so far as to trigger a socialization process, which not only sustains transatlantic economic interdependence but contributes to cementing a sense, however loose, of community (McNamara 2008). Elements typical of a common economic space, then, exist in transatlantic relations. In

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<sup>5</sup> The EU and Mexico signed a trade agreement in 1997 that was later upgraded into a free trade area for goods and services. The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which is (as its name suggests) a more ambitious document, is more recent (2014).

addition, while an institutional framework for common sectorial rules and adjudication procedures is lacking, a successful conclusion of the TTIP negotiation would fill the gap and give economic transatlantic relations a distinctively regionalist character.

While there is no Western mechanism to transfer money, transatlantic regionalism provides for a public good because it ensures protection of borders and populations via NATO. No doubt, the Atlantic Alliance performs this state function asymmetrically – for the US, for instance, NATO is less a defence asset than it is an instrument of power projection. But other member states have sub-contracted significant parts of their defence to it, including a few that have done so entirely. The West already emerges as a very peculiar form of regionalism, as it is organized hierarchically rather than horizontally

## **4.2 Drivers of Western Regionalization**

Western regionalization seems to fall neatly in a monocausal explanation. The bipolar structure of global power during the Cold War triggered a dynamic of aggregation around the two main superpowers, most notably in Europe, where two opposite Eastern and Western blocs were created and codified in the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Governments' choices to aggregate were determined by considerations of national security and dominated by strategies of counterbalancing and bandwagoning (Waltz 1979).

However, if the monocausal explanation sheds light on the initial driver of Western regionalization, it has proved less persuasive in making sense of its sustainability. NATO's obstinacy to endure has posed a theoretical challenge to realists. They still argue that its endurance is a residual element of the past that will fade away eventually unless a new common threat, such as a resurgent and hostile Russia, re-emerges (Mearsheimer 1990; Waltz 1993 and 2000; Kagan 2003). Liberal institutionalists counter that common transatlantic institutions – both formal like NATO and informal such as the many contact groups comprising the US and a restricted number of EU countries – are established instruments to manage both intra-West relations and external challenges. They provide systemic incentives that keep the transatlantic relationship from dwindling (McCalla 1996; Haftendorn, Keohane and Wallander 1999). Social constructivists contend that transatlantic relations reflect an evolving “configuration of interests, interdependencies, institutions and identity” (the four “Is”, see Risse 2012: 3).

## **4.3 The West as a Regional Community**

For realists, there is no West beyond a threat-determined temporary coalition of sovereign states pursuing self-help. Yet, the West fares well if measured with the metrics of Hettne's regionness scale. The security dilemma has been overcome and political regimes have achieved a remarkable degree of convergence, with the US, Canada, and European countries all espousing pluralist democratic systems. Macroeconomic homogenization is limited, and yet since the 1990s supply-side economics and free trade discourse and practices have been in the ascendancy on both shores of the Atlantic, a process that the successful conclusion of TTIP could re-energize. The West is thus characterized by well-established (if not always stable) frameworks of relations, most notably NATO and the various EU-US cooperation forums, premised on commonality or compatibility of interests but also values and normative practices, whereby violence as an instrument to solve intra-regional disputes is socially unthinkable.

For non-realist theorists the complexity of transatlantic relations is such that it has warranted the use of a wider panoply of categories to define and understand them. These categories are now part and parcel of the regionalism dictionary. In the 1950s

Karl Deutsch pointed out the peculiarity of the West as an imaginary “pluralistic security community” detached from geography and based on “dependable expectations of peaceful change” (Deutsch 1957: 9). Adler and Barnett have argued that security communities are characterized by the sharing of identities, values and meanings; directness and many-sidedness of intra-regional relations; and diffused reciprocity among regional states (both because of interest-based considerations and out of a sense of mutual obligation) (Adler and Barnett 1998). Thomas Risse’s conceptualization of the structure of the West as a four-pillar edifice based on interests, interdependence, institutions and identities draws heavily from this. Risse also argues that, while the concept of security community was originally applied to elites, there is no theoretical impediment to extend it to the “attitudes and activities of ordinary citizens”, whereby societal links are posited as a supporting pillar of the security community (Risse 2012: 3). The combined effect of the four ‘Is’ puts the West into the higher end of Hettne’s regional scale. As a *regional community*, the West is one step behind the EU’s ‘regional polity’ but ahead of North America’s ‘regional society’.

#### 4.4 Shaping International Relations: the West and the ‘Outer’ World

Thanks to the combined effect of its economic, political and cultural clout, the West makes for a powerful agent of change in international relations.

The West contributes to articulating the cultural diversity of the international system, as it stands for political pluralism, rule of law, individual rights and the separation of religion and state, which make up the normative core of liberal democracies. On the other hand, Western culture is not only one among others. Its values, at least the core highlighted above, are understood to be global, not Western. Because of their universalism, Western values and norms make up the pillar of international law as well as the normative framework of global governance mechanisms. In addition, they are shared by many countries from other regions, such as Latin America, which however tend to emphasize internationally more acceptable norms such as non-interference and sovereignty when they venture into international affairs.

As a matter of fact, the irresistible universalistic zest of Western norms contrasts with the logic of preserving cultural diversity through the building and interaction of culturally relatively homogeneous regions. Alternative cultural discourses have had to adapt to this ‘imperial’ aspect of Western norms, sometimes succumbing (as in the Balkans), sometimes finding forms of more or less working syncretism (as in India), but often clashing with it (as in Russia or even more so in China). Besides, while norms may be universal in essence, they will always retain a strong element of cultural specificity as long as one region pretends to be the standard-bearer of such norms. Western norms are often perceived by non-Western countries as a rhetorical cloak in which the West opportunistically wraps its interests, particularly when it comes to peace and security (Tocci 2014). At times, however, the opposition is genuine: Western values, particularly individual rights contrasting with deep-seated social and religious habits (gay rights, for instance), are rejected on their own merit. Even when challenged, the extent of the West’s cultural impact is at any rate undeniable: Western culture remains the world’s irremovable terms of reference.

The inherent tension within normative discourses and practices partly overlaps with, and partly derives from, Western power. After all, the outreach of Western culture is largely a function of the fact that the West is not only a cultural region but also a geopolitical ‘pole’. Indeed the West contributes to structuring the global balance of power more than any other region. It does so in part according to traditional patterns of regionalism, that is, structured, formalized or well-established cooperation among regional states. Thus, we see Western power emanating and expanding from NATO and the broader partnerships between the US (and Canada) and the EU. In part,

however, the nature of Western power is such that the West is less a 'pole' itself than it is a system of alliances and partnership *around* a pole, the US (Alcaro and Dityrych 2014).

On the surface NATO is a standard organization in which all members enjoy equal status. However, the imbalance of power between the US and its allies involves decisions that are not taken based on consensus but hierarchy. In intergovernmental regional organizations, all member states' interests must be accommodated, whereby the result is often, though not always, a common denominator-based policy. By contrast, in hierarchical structures the decision-making procedure (*de facto* if not *de jure*) is such that the leader's decisions prevail because the leader, by providing social order and security, gets loyalty and support from the followers (Lake 2006).

NATO's internal dynamics are not always as straightforward, of course. The subtleties of US leadership entail a relationship between leader and followers that necessitates the former to convince, cajole and woo the latter. In such a structure, ample room for disagreements remains. Nevertheless, divergences can hardly stop the leader from pursuing its objectives, even if they might at times be so severe to imperil the well-functioning of NATO. Most of the time dissenting followers eventually reach an accommodation so that both parties can pursue the benefits of their asymmetrical but mutually satisfying relationship.

The case of TTIP is interesting in this regard, because it reflects 'interdependence' more than one-way dependency. The agreement is premised on features that make the West a security community, particularly the many-sidedness of the relationship and the diffusion of benefits. Yet, TTIP also aims to create a transatlantic market based on a largely harmonized regulatory regime that would provide the US and the EU with the ability to set 'the rules of the game' in global regulations and trade. The sheer magnitude of the transatlantic market would eventually compel other countries to abide by its rules and standards in order to get access to it (Hamilton 2014). Ratification of TTIP would, in other words, reinforce the status of the West as a 'pole'.

Many experts see a risk in this. The geopolitical benefit of TTIP, they argue, is in its potential to create a rule-based level playing field for economic and trade relations that would eventually benefit the global economy (Plummer 2014). If TTIP is designed as an agreement open to other countries, it could work as a transmission belt with global economic governance mechanisms, in that it would foster an approximation of standards and rules around the world. On the contrary, if TTIP were to produce a transatlantic fortress, regional economic governance would ultimately be detrimental to global governance.

In the security field, NATO has battled with the difficulty of reconnecting with the global security framework of the UNSC since the Alliance started to intervene outside its traditional Euro-Atlantic remit. After the rift over Kosovo, where NATO intervened lacking a UN mandate, the Alliance has operated with a UN mandate in Afghanistan, Libya and off the coast of Somalia. NATO has also stated its intention to act as a 'hub' for other security-focused regional organizations and insisted that its growing focus on the 'global commons' (space, air, sea and cyberspace) is in the interest of all.

The role of Western regionalism in bringing change to established behavioural patterns in international relations is difficult to assess. It was a US-led coalition that set up the UN and Bretton Woods systems and gave legitimacy and authority to institutions of international law, multilateralism and free trade. Western regionalism has nonetheless remained state-based and is actually organized more hierarchically than intergovernmentally. This explains the selective commitment to multilateralism often displayed by Western countries, most notably the US, and highlights the inherent

tension that characterizes Western regional structures, both existing (NATO) or in the making (TTIP). Is NATO a pillar of a region-based multilateral order, as it sometimes claims to be, or does it simply reflect the hegemonic order? Will TTIP be a driver of an evolving global system of trade rules and regulatory standards or an interregional accord aimed at maximizing the influence of the West? The capacity of Western regionalism to be a harbinger of change in international relations depends on where the balance will tilt.

#### **4.5 Disintegration Risks in the West**

Western regionalization processes have not lost steam. NATO has expanded its membership and EU-US ties have grown thicker even if TTIP, which is still far from becoming a reality, is not taken into account. Cooperation on issues such as checking Russia's revanchist instincts or Iran's nuclear ambitions attests to the lingering existence of such a thing as a 'Western security interest'. The TTIP negotiation points to a desire to codify and increase interdependence with an economic transatlantic institutional framework.

The picture, however, is by no means all rosy. For the West, the risk is not so much that of disintegration as of looser ties. This may result from a diminished capacity to act jointly – a problem that besets NATO, given Europe's diminishing defence spending; an inability to overcome domestic resistance to TTIP, which would prevent greater cooperation on regulation and trade; a massive imbalance in priorities, particularly if US-China relations take on an antagonistic tone (which would severely diminish the relevance of Europe in US eyes); or even an isolationist turn, if large domestic constituencies traditionally supportive of the Western alliance dwindle and fade out. It should be noted though that even a looser relationship would not amount to the end of the West as a region, at least not immediately and not irreversibly. Western countries have no incentive to ditch a relationship that continues to provide benefits for the leader and the followers alike, rests on massive economic foundations, and unfolds in a largely common normative framework.

### **5. Conclusions**

We have compared regionalism in Europe, North America and the North Atlantic across five parameters that can be used to characterize all regions: the functions regions perform; the drivers of regionalization; their cohesiveness; their capacity to structure the 'outer' world; and their vulnerability. We have shown that North America is mainly a geographic and commercial region, Europe stands out because of its structural reliance on common rules and the 'West' or North Atlantic as a region in which strategic interests mingle with normative convergence- All this, we believe, adds an important element of porosity to the term region.

In terms of functions, Europe and North America stand quite apart. In contrast to Europe, which has been experimenting for decades across the full variety spectrum, in North America there is little common economic space, only a limited and carefully delineated bilateral provision of public goods, and no regional legal authority. The West fares even worse than North America. Not only does it lack any legal regional authority, it also has no regulated economic common space – though TTIP could change this considerably. Yet Western regionalism stands out in at least one respect, in that a regional organization, NATO, provides for the territorial defence of most if its twenty-eight member states.

European regionalism has multiple drivers, some manifesting from security and economic interests, but others from ideational factors such as a common identity and the universal rejection of war as an instrument to solve intra-European disputes. This

multiplicity of elements is also apparent in the case of the West, although here the material factors – US power and security interests in particular – have such a pre-eminent position that some scholars consider other drivers accessory. The debate is less controversial regarding North American regionalism, which being economic in nature is easily explained with an economic-only driver. However, it is significant that advocates of deeper North American integration insist that it is warranted by broader political interests, ideational proximity as well as the growing impact of the sizable percentage of Hispanic population in the US

On balance, a striking degree of convergence in political regimes characterizes the North Atlantic. Commonality of political values shapes a regional environment in which intra-regional borders have lost any meaning in terms of national defence. Regional economies have also drawn closer, although obviously to varying degrees. Europe is the only case in which the regional dimension is as important as or even more important than the national one in political, economic and security terms. This is because of the EU's partially supranational decision-making, the high level of economic integration, and the fact that security is mainly an extra-regional matter. Europe's degree of regionness is such that it can be described as a 'regional polity'. The West comes second: security policymakers in Europe or the US or Canada look at the North Atlantic as an asset, not a source of concern; the US and European economies are deeply interpenetrated and, if TTIP is concluded, will be for the first time comprehensively regulated. Decision-making remains a sovereign matter, but the leader-followers relationship between the US and its allies in Europe often results in the grouping acting as one. All this earns the West the status of a 'regional community'. North America lacks most of the institutional structures (formal and informal) created by Europe and the West, but is nonetheless a space regulated by rules and generally cooperative practices. As such, it is an advanced form of 'regional society'.

All three regions contribute to shaping international relations, albeit in a different fashion. The West's relationship with the 'outer' world is characterized by an internal tension. The West is both a container of a cultural specificity and the bearer of a normative core that is conceived of as transcending any cultural specificity. Western cultural outreach is a function of its power, which largely resides with the US. Hence, the manner in which the West mostly affects the international constellation of power is binary, that is, it generates either a dynamic of convergence with US strategic preferences or one of more or less explicit antagonism. This framework greatly diminishes the capacity of Europe to act as an autonomous pole. In fact, European countries act according to 'polar' logics deriving from two different geographical cores, Europe and the West, reflecting two different structures of power, consensus-based and supranational in the former, and hegemonic in the latter. When the two collide, it is the second form of logic that usually prevails. This does not mean that Western international action is entirely power-determined and consequently arbitrary. On the contrary, the West is a strong promoter of liberal forms of state interaction. Nevertheless, the predominance of the US in the Western coalition constrains the ability of Europe to diffuse its model of regionalism, which has found little emulation. The status of the US as superpower also inhibits advanced forms of North American regionalism and consequently any form of North American-European interregionalism.

Finally, the three regions differ in terms of internal vulnerability. Europe's integration has made EU countries largely dependent on one another. The lack of a central authority in key areas such as foreign affairs, defence, and most importantly fiscal policy creates ample room for conflict. Such conflicts have been a constant in the EU's history, but in the context of the Eurozone crisis and the potential exit of Greece or the UK, a roll-back of European regionalism is now a plausible scenario. By contrast, the relatively low degree of regional integration achieved by North America shields it from

risks of reversal. Assessing the vulnerability of Western regionalism is more difficult. NATO has a problem of imbalance in military capabilities, while TTIP is a project in the making with no guarantee of success. In addition, China's ascendancy will increase the gap between US and European priorities, whereby a loosening of the transatlantic bond might ensue. At the same time, the fundamental bargain underlying the US-European relationship, the provision of security by the leader (the US) in exchange of loyalty from the followers (European countries plus Canada), continues to provide benefits for both parties. The West might look volatile on the surface, but its foundations are more solid than it appears at first sight.

Comparing regionalism in Europe, North America and the North Atlantic/West			
Parameter	Europe	North America	North Atlantic/West
<i>Functions of regionalism</i>	<p>Common economic space provided by the EU single market</p> <p>Resource allocation by EU institutions</p> <p>(Partial) sovereignty over EU member states by EU institutions over communitarised areas and by ECtHR over ECHR member states</p>	<p>Partial common economic space provided by NAFTA</p>	<p>Potential common economic space if TTIP is ratified</p> <p>Provision of security and defence</p>
<i>Regionalization drivers</i>	<p>Multicausal explanation for both inception and sustainability of regionalization process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commonality of interests, both geopolitical and economic</li> <li>- Common identities and shared values</li> <li>- Common institutions</li> <li>- Spillover effects of integration process</li> </ul>	<p>Monocausal explanation of inception and sustainability of regionalization process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commonality of economic interests</li> </ul>	<p>Monocausal explanation of inception of regionalization process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commonality of threat</li> </ul> <p>Multicausal explanation of sustainability of regionalization process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Converging interests (economic and strategic)</li> <li>- Economic interdependence</li> <li>- Common institutions</li> <li>- Shared identity</li> </ul>
<i>Degree of regionness</i>	<p>Regional polity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Security dilemma overcome</li> <li>- Macroeconomic homogeneity</li> <li>- Common</li> </ul>	<p>Regional society:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Security dilemma irrelevant, though not overcome</li> <li>- Partial macroeconomy</li> </ul>	<p>Regional community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Security dilemma overcome</li> <li>- Increasing macroeconomic homogeneity</li> <li>- Common political regimes</li> </ul>

	political regimes	ic homogeneity - Increasing convergence of political regimes	
<i>Capacity to structure international relations</i>	<p>Cultural specificity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for dialogue and multilateralism, political pluralism, environmentalism and sustainable development, cosmopolitanism</li> </ul> <p>Mid-level governance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top-down or delegation (UN-EU cooperation)</li> <li>- Bottom up or policing (e.g. ECHR as implementation of UDHR)</li> </ul> <p>'Pole' in global constellation of power:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trade, regulations, norms</li> </ul> <p>Promoter of regionalism-based multilateralism</p>	<p>Very loose cultural specificity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural pluralism</li> </ul> <p>Mid-level governance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bottom-up (NAFTA in keeping with WTO provisos)</li> </ul> <p>No 'pole' role</p> <p>Promoter of state-based multilateralism</p>	<p>Cultural specificity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promotion of democracy, human rights, secularism, rule of law</li> </ul> <p>'Pole' in global constellation of power:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Security, with US in the lead</li> <li>- Economic and regulatory, particularly if TTIP is ratified</li> </ul> <p>Promoter of state-based multilateralism</p>
<i>Disintegration risks</i>	<p>Plausible scenarios of partial disintegration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grexit</li> <li>- Brexit</li> <li>- Greater disarticulation</li> </ul>	No plausible scenario of disintegration	Low risk of disintegration, though the relationship may become looser

	of EU governance system and/or roll- back of competencies to national level		
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