

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

From the formal and supranational European Union (EU) to the loose, informal political policy platforms of ASEAN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and East Asian Community (EAC), regional organizations vary significantly in their institutional structures, the types of obligations they impose on member states, and the scope of their activities.

Despite the fact that states conscientiously preserve territorial integrity and national sovereignty from supranational institutions, European states have established a dense network of regional organizations to address security, economic, and other needs since the end of the Second World War. In wider Europe, some regional organizations are characterized by intergovernmental cooperation such as Council of Europe (COE), Western European Union (WEU), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), etc.

In the 'Europe of the Communities,' the process of deeper integration was achieved through the creation of a 'functional community' namely European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)'s with its supranational organ known as 'High Authority' in 1951. Integration process continues through what is now known as the EU. The working processes of the EU can be summarized in the concepts of 'supranationalism' and 'intergovernmentalism'. At the same time, in security matters and home affairs, intergovernmental cooperation among member states also exists in the EU. Yet, to look broadly at Europe regionalism, all of these organizations mentioned above gave birth to the so-called 'Nested European Institutions,' whereby supranationalism co-exists with intergovernmental cooperation in the same region.¹

With a different historical background, East Asia has formulated regional cooperation that is belated and limited compared to those of Europe. Since many Asian countries were European colonies and only gained their independence after the Second World War, this has left them strongly attached to their freshly obtained state sovereignty. East Asia has shown a slow evolution of institutional structures. This

¹ See chapter 2.

reveals the political nature of the cooperation as a loose form of intergovernmental cooperation that accords highest priority to the preservation of national sovereignty. Regionalism here appears to be in the form of overlapping intergovernmental cooperation frameworks mostly amongst the states former European colonies. Some states belong to various regional grouping with no intention, until lately, to progress towards any form of the ‘pooling of sovereignty’.²

It is crucial to note that circumstances in each European integration process are quite unique and distinctive. As an international organization, EU shares in many ways the functions and – in some extent – powers traditionally characterized by the states. These unique experiences are anchored at historical and socio-economic context of the time. Therefore, application of such framework to explain other regional groupings must be conducted with this awareness.

This paper suggests that the EAC has not taken the path towards integration process exemplified in the first step of the EU (especially ECSC) but rather with the approach of COE. This is likely to be a loose network of regional organizations that will address new global issues such as terrorism, epidemics, natural disasters, etc. Given this, the EAC might be a little more than a forum for exchanging ideas and information on social, economic and cultural matters. Other political and security concerns seem to be too sensitive to be discussed on the table. EAC might be able to play only consultative roles, and then a little less than an efficient regional organization. However, in 2007 ‘ASEAN Charter’ project aiming at an enhancement of ASEAN into an ‘ASEAN Community’ is expected to strengthen ASEAN institutions. The success of this project could be a complementary force that drives the EAC process.

However, EAC ideas and projects also have her owns space and time. The EAC will have to respect the logic of ‘variable geometry’ or ‘EAC at different speed’ according to the European contexts for each member states. This is what has been called ‘differentiated integration,’ where the speed of integration depends on each national’s capabilities in the EU.³ At the minimum, intergovernmental cooperation attempts towards pooled sovereignty in specific activities could emerge in the course

² See Intergovernmentalism in chapter 1, pp. 13-16.

³ See chapter 3.

of East Asian cooperation. However, it might be useful to note here that parallel to this, the roles of international actors such as TNCs, INGOs, civil society, etc. should also be examined to understand this phenomenon (this aspect falls outside of the scope of this paper).

In conclusion, the EU exemplifies a core institution of 'Nested European Institutions' even though the interconnectedness between European Union and other institutions (such as COE, WEU, OSCE, OECD, and NATO) are neither systematic nor equally formalized. Yet, the success of the EU as one of the major actors in world affairs could effectively revitalize and stimulate European regional cooperation in the broader term. Thus, the process of institutionalization of regionalism in Europe seems to be unique in its itinerary, which is a combination of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. On the contrary, unless the EAC can move toward a more integrative form and find the most appropriate approach of its own purposes and its stakes, EAC will be just another framework of regional cooperation encompassing almost the same member countries of other existing frameworks in East Asia (or Asia Pacific). Overlapping frameworks, widening without deepening, ad hoc rather than formal institutionalization, EAC could become a brand new forum among other existing fora. Conferencing, consulting without any efforts for further effective coordination, let alone integration, a 21st century attempt to move towards a kind of regionalism enabled by anticipation of 'community' could become only a vision without any roles in regional order and world affairs.