

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
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SUMMARY

PhD Thesis

**EU's interregional relations. The cooperation with
regional organisations within the EU foreign policy**

Scientific coordinator:
Prof. Univ. Dr. Iordan Gh. BĂRBULESCU

PhD Candidate:
Mădălin-Cătălin BLIDARU

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Summary

Abstract

The external relations of the European Union are often studied from a geographic or thematic standpoint, mainly as interactions with sovereign states or with global UN organisations. However, this approach leaves behind the regional level of analysis and the supranational regional arrangements as units, particularly regional integration and cooperation organisations. Using a cross-cutting perspective on the EU's relations with these organisations, based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, this thesis fills this missing piece through an analysis of the asymmetries among EU's relations with those arrangements. Thus, it provides a comprehensive outlook on the role of global regions in the EU foreign policy.

This thesis explores and identifies the participation of the European institutions in building their relations with extra-European regional organisations, oriented towards the political, strategic, and operational frameworks allowing these mechanisms for interregional cooperation. Moreover, within a global web of dozens of regional organisations, an instrument for analysis and research is designed in order to assess the composition of interregional cooperation: a system of indicators based on five dimensions and 24 relevant indicators for interregional cooperation. This system allows options to highlight economic, political, institutional variations existing across the spectrum of interregional relations. The instrument can be used to extract a few models of interregional cooperation based on the depth of the relations between the EU, on one side, and these regional structures from the Neighbourhood, from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean, or Pacific. The particularities of each model are described in extenso in the thesis.

The demonstration indicates a pivoting role of regional organisations in supporting and promoting the foreign agenda of the European Union, based on less explored strategic frameworks and toolbox. The work contributes to improvements in the scientific information available on interregional relations, supporting the research agenda of comparative regionalism in International Relations. Besides the theoretical contribution, the approach has practical implications, from EU foreign policy and external relations analysis, where the EU assumes

the priority of regional cooperative orders, to, based on a public policy perspective, the provision of an instrument of assessment, evaluation, and monitoring of the effectiveness of the EU support for regional integration.

This summary provides a brief description of the main components of the thesis, according to each chapter. As annexes, there are available the list of contents of the PhD thesis and a selective bibliography of the publications consulted for the development of the arguments and contents of the thesis on EU's interregional relations.

Introduction and methodological aspects

Starting from the idea of cooperative regional orders, included in the priorities of the EU Global Strategy, the thesis is focused on the relations between the European Union and other regional states systems institutionalized as international organisations.

The role of regions and of interregional relations constitute an emerging research agenda, developed mainly in the previous two decades, focused on the study on how regional integration and cooperation processes interact. The work is based on a comparative approach on the asymmetries between the EU and other organisations and structures of regional cooperation, on the role of the EU institutions in the development of these relations, and on the place of some institutional, political, social, and economic indicators supporting the development of the cooperation relations with these structures.

Its theoretical contribution in the subfield of the external relations of the European Union focuses on the role of regions in the institutional architecture of the EU foreign policy. Therefore, it contributes to enlarging the modalities on how the interactions with other actors in international politics is studied and it is centered on the regional governance environment, beyond the general cooperation with states. Applied, a system of indicators is built. This system is an instrument of measurement of the differences among different models of interregional cooperation. Furthermore, an inventory of the political and strategic tools EU has for interregional cooperation is showcased.

The PhD thesis, supported by the related research programme, aims at understanding the role the regions have in the EU foreign policy through regional organisations, at exploring the institutional relations between the EU and those regions, and at developing a framework for comparative analysis of the asymmetries in the cooperation between the EU and other regional arrangements.

Three research objectives have been defined and followed: 1) identification of the theoretical contributions that allows us to understand in-depth the regional organisations and the interregional relations; 2) analysis of the programmatic documents of the EU and other primary sources to identify the role of interregional relations in the EU and EU institutions international cooperation architecture; 3) building a model framework for comprehensive measurement of the asymmetries in EU interregional relations, testing it, and explaining the results, including the collection and processing of the relevant dataset and the development and maintenance of the database.

These objectives, based on the main research questions (how are the asymmetries between the EU and other regional integration and cooperation organisations developed?), are operationalized through three hypotheses, corresponding the related research questions:

I1. Regional organisations have a defined role in the EU foreign policy architecture, having a history of formal cooperation (e.g., international agreements, projects of biregional and interregional cooperation).

I2. Models of cooperation can be identified based on the existing asymmetries in the EU cooperation with various regional organisations in Africa, Asia, and America. These asymmetries can be described through a set of variables.

I3. As a factor in strengthening the interregional relations, the European Union uses a set of informal and formal institutions and norms to legitimize and delegitimize regional organisations and arrangements across the Globe.

In the case of the first hypothesis, the approach is based on an exploratory endeavor on the role of regional organisations within the foreign policy strategies of the EU, as well as on the cooperation between the EU institutions with other regions, regional organisations and institutions of those regional organisations. The second one follows a quantitative approach, based on a system of indicators for interregional cooperation. Data has been collected during the PhD research programme. The index provides a structured and structural perspective on the EU interregional relations. For the third hypothesis, a case study on organisations missing in the EU interregional relations is explored, using quantitative and qualitative methods, and testing the arguments for the lower level of interaction.

Structure of the PhD thesis

It is structured on three sections.

The first section covers the introductions, methodological aspects, theoretical aspects and issues related to the conceptual framework. The role of region in the international society is explained, as well as other key concepts (e.g., interregionalism, multi-level external relations).

The second question answers a set of questions on the role of regions in the international organisation, on the external relations of the European Communities, and on the consolidation of the interregional dynamics in the EU external relations. On the other hand, it analyses the participation of the European institutions in supporting the interregional relations, thus highlighting the instrument EU has for legitimizing or delegitimizing other regional arrangements.

The third section covers the main research dimension of the thesis. It presents the index that has been developed, its technical aspects, the basis of the selection of the indicators. It explains the results and the generated models of cooperation. The main vectors explaining the cooperation between the EU and various regional organisations are described and these models of cooperation are extracted based on the asymmetries existing in the EU cooperation with those organisations from Africa, Asia, America, or Pacific. Also, the situation of the organisations with a lower interaction level is tested.

Theoretical aspects and conceptual framework

The thesis is based and built on contributions from the fields of European Studies, the English School of International Relations, and International Political Economy. Inputs from the sub-area of comparative regionalism are used.

Authors argue that international organisations reflect the presence of international societies, similarly with the cases of regional or sub-global international organisations (e.g., Buzan, 2001; Diez et al., 2011). This perspective is rarely used in the analysis of regional integration, even if the founding approaches of the international society were based on the expansion of the European society. The English School could provide added value on the study of European integration.

Other authors are focused on the tendency of the area of European Studies of being inward oriented, without considering larger perspectives, highlighting the risk of considering the EU as a *sui generis* case, even neglecting that some challenges of the European governance were visible in other historical and regional contents. They are also focused on the internal development of the EU, neglecting in this case the theorization of the relations developed on

the other side of the EU borders (Diez & Whitman, 2002). From their perspective, the European Union is an international society development in a particular regional setting.

International societies, even the European ones, are not entities structured on exclusive geographical spaces. This is valid for another concept of the British institutionalism, the international system. The EU international society is embedded in other international societies (Diez & Whitman, 2002). Using this analytical framework, the authors offer insights on the EU's positioning in the international system, on the EU international society, on the European international society, and on the international societies from by EU and other entities as its neighbours (e.g., EU-Turkey, EU-MENA, EU-Russia). The difference is the degree of interlinkages among various plans. The regional international societies succeed in following the tension between the particular and universal within the English School, thus allowing for the developing of common institutions and identities, but also some different ones.

Starting from the six primary institutions of the English School (mutual recognition of sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, balance of power, great power management, and war, according to the perspectives of Hedley Bull (1977)) and from the constitutive principles the institutions build for international order, Knudsen (2019) mentioned the role of the international organisations, as secondary institutions, shaped by the primary ones, formalised, and essential for the dynamics of fundamental institutions of the international society. This allows for a discussion of the regional organisations as regional international societies and also for reducing the risk of falling into an analytical trap of considering the regional organisations identified strictly by the European model of integration.

24 regional arrangements, mainly organisations, were included in the system of indicators. Only few of them could be considered emulations of the European model of regional integration processes. Furthermore, international organisations are constitutive elements of the international order and can socialize states in adopting and supporting practices, and even adaptations of their institutions in regional context. Institutional developments could be mentioned in this case, allowing in different contexts for particular shapes based on 'subsidiarity of norms' (Acharya, 2011), with interventions such as adaptations, solidarization, easing, and other processes on the dynamics of institutions between the global and regional levels (Buranelli, 2019).

Concerns as those explored in this thesis have been recent. The history of regionalism, the history of the ideas behind this process, theoretical endeavors were noticeable for the entire post-World War II period. In the literature, a categorization on four levels is made: early regionalism, old regionalism, new regionalism, and comparative regionalism

(Söderbaum, 2016). This thesis is placed within the last wave, corresponding to structural changes in the international environment such as the emergence of new powers, increasing importance of new types of crises, new regional dynamics, projects, and processes, new regionalization developments and preoccupation on the role of regions in global governance.

A contribution of regions on maintenance of order is identified. The regions encapsulate and use institutions, understood as set of norms – institutions searching for order on the above-mentioned logic. Original debates on this role offered by regions can be identified even in the Dumberton Oaks Conference on the international organisations after the World War I. This debate is presented in the thesis, underlining two different directions on how regions contribute to international security, one based on prominent role, a second one based on the reactions as the international level, the global one, on the crises in their respective regions.

But the dynamics among regions are not only the ones of cooperation. Other phenomena could emerge in interregional relations and they can generate tensions in interregional cooperation. The work underlines as sources of these tensions the multi-level external relations, the nature of the international order, overlapping regional integration and cooperation projects, and the transition from interregionalism to bilateralism as strategy for political objectives. All of these are part of the inventory the EU can use to legitimize or delegitimize processes of regional cooperation and integration.

Some aspects that set the paradigm used in this research needs to be noted. Firstly, it is embedded in the theory of international society, with contributions from regional integration and international governance theories. Regional organisations are considered as sub-systems of the global environment. Moreover, these regional organisations are also regional societies, sharing the participation in a global international society whose institutions and norms are the ones of the UN, in general, and in regional international societies, characterised by their own dynamics, more or less integrated.

The international organisations are constitutive elements of the international order and can sustain global, regional, or region-to-region associated practices. Therefore, there are perspectives of interregional cooperation for mutual legitimization and for functional reasons. Interregional cooperation plays a role in evolution of the international society and, overall, in the international organisation. Regional organisations are in the same time vectors of governance, agents of great powers/associations of powers, and variable forms of cooperation. They are a complex phenomenon.

The role of regions in the evolution of the European project

There is past shared by the European project and interregional relations. Aspects of international organizations during the Cold War show how regional integration developed in two distinct regional political, economic, and military architectures in the East and the West, and also how it extended outside of the bipolar system. With the development of the European Economic Community, it built privileged relations with established and emerging regions.

If we exclude the predecessor of various regional arrangements, the first waves in the development of regionalism took place during the Cold War. The developments of that time show the emergence and consolidation of regional arrangements around the globe, many of them evolving into organizations we meet today, from economic arrangements as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to political ones as the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Organisation of American States (OAS) to military alliances as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Other remain only in the project proposal phase or met challenges blocking their development in just a few years or decades. The project of the Middle East Defence Organization and the failure of the Middle East Treaty Organization reflect tensions and conflicts among different entities in the region.

In addition to the two regional sides and their arrangements for regional cooperation and integration (OECE, then EEC and OECD, and Comecon in the economic affairs, NATO and the Warsaw Pact in military affairs), multiple processes develop in the Third World. New regional organisations legitimised by political objective appeared. In Africa, The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) is founded in 1963, the predecessor of the African Union, being the first African continental organisation. While it did not have elements of supranational cooperation in its Charter, it aimed at coordination of activities and policy harmonization in given policy areas. At the subcontinental level, various arrangements, regional and subregional organisations, were started, some of them surviving the end of the Cold War and gaining economic legitimacy in the moment of the signing of the treaty establishing the African Economic Community and the respective regional cooperation organisations.

Asia is not far from founding multiple regional organizations. Among them, in Western Asia and the North of Africa, the League of Arab States functioned before the establishment of the United Nations. In South Asia, in the case of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), major conflicts among members such as the one between India and Pakistan limited the cooperation potential in some fields, particularly security and defence. In America, the Cold War regional integration initiatives were limited

transcontinentally, with intergovernmental organisations and fora, free trade agreements, and then, common market projects in some areas. How they evolved is further developed in the thesis.

The member states of the European Economic Communities started developing their own foreign policy. Since the Treaty of Rome (1957), we find signs of a proto-foreign policy, also including some links to regional organisations. Its annexes cover a joint declaration of the founding six on cooperation with member states of international organisations.

Until the institutionalization of the European Political Cooperation, the external relations were more visible at Commission level. Afterwards, tensions started to appear among institutions. The advantage of the exclusivity on trade policy and of the cooperation on international development matters encouraged the development of interregional relations with entities such as the African and Malagasy Union or parties to the General Treaty of Central American Economic Integration. The first formal relations were established with former colonies obtaining their independence. The Yaoundé Convention (1963), an agreement between the European Economic Community and an association of 18 African and Malagasy states for five years, being further developed institutionally within the development policy, had a powerful regional pillar. In addition, in the 1970s, concerns over other European and extra-European regional entities were developed, including for the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), and the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). In is also the period when the Euro-Arab dialogue is developed. In the 1980, the number of agreements with Asian regional organisations extended, including ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and also with Americas (Andean Community, Central America).

At the end of the Cold War and the following decades, the emergence of regional arrangements has been observable in the entire world, including transformational changes in the existing organisations, from economic communities, where applicable, to economic union, and even political union aims. Of course, in other situations, visible attempts of reanimation or disintegration have been found.

Transformational changes took place in the European Union, including at the level of the EU foreign policy in the context of the emergence of regions after the Cold War. For example, the EU made a step from an economic community to an economic and political union. Mechanisms for a common foreign policy were enshrined in the treaties, as well as new procedures allowing for the development of the external relations. The Lisbon Treaty (2007)

brought legal personality for the European Union and a new architecture of the Common Security and Foreign Policy. Moreover, the Union can conclude agreements with international organisations with the conditions that there is some correspondence with the principles guiding the EU's existence and that it contributes to the achievement of the external action objectives.

Analysing the 2003 European Security Strategy, regional organisations are considered only through their role in strengthening the global governance. Later, the EU Global Strategy (2016) focuses on the regional organisations. Regional dynamics are seen as a solution for the tensions between the local and the global. EUGS described regions as “critical spaces of governance in a multi-centered world” (EUGS, 2016, p. 32). It is provided also the argument why the European Union supports regional arrangements: to consolidate its own peace and development. This strategy mentions also that regional orders are not coming in a single form. *Au contraire*, they could be based on a mix of interregional, regional, subregional, and bilateral relations.

Regional strategies were formulated and approved. The number of the regional strategies adopted by the European Union is limited from a regional distribution standpoint. The framework of cooperation is proposed through communications for the European Commission and the High Representative to the EU Council and the European Parliament, accompanied by the Council conclusions adopting the action proposals and other elements from the communication, bringing additional details, if necessary. At the same time, there are interregional political agreements establishing the context of the relations with various regional organisations, allowing the development of strategies for the regions of interest. In Africa, at continental level, there is the Joint Africa – EU Partnership, revised a few times and implemented through the EU – Africa Strategy (2007, and the further renewal after COVID-19 in 2021). Similarly, for specific regions, regional and subregional strategies were developed.

Participation of the EU institutions in the development of interregional relations

Questions arise as to how relations with regional arrangements are designed within the European institutions. This chapter answers these questions.

With regard to interregional relations, the European Council has a strategic, decision-making, and international cooperation role, based on its competences defined by the Treaty. The activity is formal and informal. It has been more than two decades since European leaders participated in interregional meetings in various formats of cooperation. With some

organizations, however, their relations are part of the recent developments. A history of *summitry* based on dialogue with regional fora and organisations is present (Eastern Partnership, African Union, Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, League of Arab States, Asia-Europe Meeting, and others).

The format of interregional meetings differs from region to region. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the relationship between the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States is described as a "bi-regional strategic partnership" built on cooperation since 1999. EU-Africa meetings have been organised since 2000. Since 2007, the intercontinental partnership has acquired a strategic and operational dimension through the adoption of the EU-Africa Joint Strategy. In relation to Africa, at the level of international summits, the commonalities with the African Union stand out. In Asia, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has been a platform for dialogue since 1996. With the strategic development of the EU-ASEAN partnership, there are prospects for a more active involvement of the European Council in *summitry*.

It is important to note that the interregional dimension of cooperation is better documented at EU Council level, with many more regional organizations, an aspect developed in the specific section of the thesis. Council sets the framework for cooperation with other regions. By treaty, the Foreign Affairs Council draws up the Union's external action on the basis of strategic guidelines laid down by the European Council. The Council has an extensive role to play in interregional relations in relation to the association of overseas countries and territories, the negotiation and conclusion of trade agreements, development cooperation, the negotiation and conclusion of international agreements. These contributions are summarized in the specific chapter.

The European Commission stands out not only for the mentioned history of interregional cooperation, but especially for its role in the implementation of policies and the competences related to international cooperation. Thus, we find an active involvement in the development and maintenance of relations with regional cooperation and integration organizations at the level of DG Trade, DG International Partnerships, DG Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Actions, DG Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations.

At the intersection of the Commission and the Council is the European External Action Service, set up in 2011. The European External Action Service is considered the "diplomatic" service of the European Union, responsible for the European Union's delegations and offices worldwide. It is divided into geographical and thematic directorates, the geographical ones covering Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe and Central Asia, the wider Middle

East, and the Americas. EEAS is characterized by the presence among the delegations of some responsible for international organizations, including of regional scale. Under the authority of the High Representative and responsible for representing the Union, there are independent delegations to regional organizations (African Union, ASEAN) and delegations to other countries responsible also for relations with regional organizations (ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, COMESA, SICA, CCG, among others).

Parliament has a limited role to play in the European Union's foreign policy decision-making process. Several hypostases of interregional cooperation can be captured: through political dialogue, scrutiny of the activities of other institutions and through interparliamentarism. Externally, there are delegations for relations with regional political for a and delegation to interparliamentary meetings, an expression of pure interregionalism in the external relations of the European Parliament, its delegations contributing to maintaining the international contacts of the institution. There are joint parliamentary committees, delegations to parliamentary committees, and other categories interparliamentary delegations, depending on the profile of the region.

The judicial authority of the European Union has a less visible role in interregional relations. The Court of Justice of the EU has a limited jurisdiction of the Common Security and Foreign Policy. The interregional dimension can be highlighted through contacts between judges, cross-references, and the settlement of interregional disputes. Jurisprudence is mentioned in the activity reports of the Court of Justice of the European Union, with cases relevant to the dimensions of EU foreign policy. Analysis of the activity reports in recent years show that decisions taken in the reporting year are outlined also in regard to international agreements and the Common Security and Foreign Policy.

The thesis also explores the contributions made by other European institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Central Bank to maintaining and developing region-to-region cooperation. The euro area central bank is less exposed to structured interregional relations with other similar organizations. First, there are few similar monetary unions. The European Investment Bank has partnerships with various multilateral development banks (MDBs), supranational banks set up by sovereign states. The list includes the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, and others. Contributions also come from consultative bodies - the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

At Union level, the toolbox includes various agreements that have been signed, some in force. The thesis mentions the agreements that were reached by the EU with different regional structures. Moreover, there is a link to the European budget. With regard to funding through the Instrument for International Cooperation, Development and Neighborhood, most of the amount allocated to external action goes to regional programs - programs covering one or more countries in those regions on the basis of geographical programming, and fewer funds to those thematic.

Measuring asymmetries in EU cooperation with regional organizations

In order to answer the question on how the asymmetries in the relations between the EU and other regional cooperation and integration organisations have been built, a system of indicators is proposed, based on theoretical and empirical contributions mentioned in the chapter before. The development of a system of indicators that can generate a composite index is based on the high number of cases that should be included in the study. Thus, an index of interregional cooperation in the EU foreign policy appears.

Based on the examination of the interregional relations of the European Union, the relations with 24 subcontinental regional organizations are proposed for analysis. The focus is on dyads between the European Union and other regional arrangements (e.g., EU-GCC, EU-EFTA, EU-IGAD). Several regional structures are also introduced that are not independent regional organizations (Eastern Partnership, Southern Neighborhood). It does not include some regional organizations whose evolution is uncertain (e.g., ALBA, UNASUR), although all regional economic communities in Africa are preserved, with the exception of North Africa (i.e., the Arab Maghreb Union, whose states are in any case included in the League Arab States, the Southern Neighborhood, and some states covered by other organizations in Africa).

The measurement system is based on five sub-indices, bringing together five sub-components of interregional cooperation: economic cooperation, political dialogue and security cooperation, international recognition, institutional cooperation, socio-political relations. The indicators reflect dimensions of cooperation, level of cooperation and interregional integration. The justification for their introduction derives from the exploratory approach in the previous chapters, from the indications provided by the theoretical approach chosen to understand the interregional relations. The indicators included in each cluster are

selected based on the analysis of the literature, analysis available in the paper (pp. 151-174), distributed as follows:

- a) economic cooperation: the existence of a trade agreement between the regions, the number of political areas covered by this international agreement, the volume of biregional trade, the stock of foreign direct investment and remittances sent from the EU to that region.
- b) political dialogue and security cooperation: interregional meetings (between organizations, high level summits), interparliamentary dialogue, security and defense cooperation agreements, EU military missions in regional member states and restrictive measures/sanctions.
- c) international recognition: the presence of the organization as an observer at the General Assemblies of the United Nations, neighborhood relations, the number of members in the regional organization and the existence of an EU delegation.
- d) institutional cooperation: EU influence in regional architecture, bi-regional agreements and treaties, number of areas of cooperation in bi-regional agreement, EU funding for regional integration, endurance of formal cooperation.
- e) socio-political relations: type of political regime, population of the region, common history, and level of human development.

The necessary data sets at regional level are obtained for each indicator. After the creation of the database with regional information at the level of each region, aggregated when appropriate from data at the state level, they are standardized at the level of indicators, as they contain different information, reflect different units of measurement. Their standardization is done at the level of the indicator by the *minmax* method, a procedure that scales the indicators between 0 and 1 on a vector, the higher the information captured by the indicator for a given case, the more evidence of a deeper integration or cooperation. There is also a case in which the formula is adjusted for the reverse situation (i.e., restrictive measures).

The weighting is based on the principal components analysis (PCA). The principal components capture the variation in a matrix. The weight of the indicators in subindices is based on the principal components obtained at the level subindex, and then at the level of the index, through the correlation of coefficients between the original variables considered and the principal components. The weights that give the new reconstructed values for each variable are thus obtained. Depending on the subindex, several main components are used. The new variables are reconstructed, then cumulatively aggregated by arithmetic mean at subindex level. The technical details of the method used are available in the thesis.

The five sub-indices are aggregated and weighted at the level of the main index also by analyzing the principal components and weighting the variables according to the variation. To verify the weighting and aggregation method used, the result is also tested based on an equal double weighting, at the level of subindexes and main index.

The data set developed within the research program and used for the development of the indicator system is publicly available, hosted in a generalist online repository, in an open data regime. In this way, access to the data used in the research is allowed in an easy way, the preservation and archiving of the data set is ensured, as well as its availability for an indefinite period.

The most integrated relations obtained are those between the European Union and EFTA, followed by the Southern Neighborhood, ASEAN, CARICOM, and the Eastern Partnership. There are consistent asymmetries between organizations. At the end, the least developed interregional relations are with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (EU), two entities in the eastern neighborhood.

A number of differences are visible, allowing the extraction of cooperation models. These models are extracted based on the results from the indicator system through a hierarchical clustering. The six models include EU interregional relations with regional arrangements based on:

1. Recognized organizations, with political and institutional cooperation as the main vectors of interregionalism (League of Arab States, Gulf Cooperation Council, Central American Integration System, Caribbean Community, and the Southern Common Market/Mercosur).
2. Partner organizations with strong regional integration and significant economic and political relations (European Free Trade Association, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Southern Neighborhood of the European Union).
3. Arrangements with missing institutional and political relations but significant economic flows (Pacific Alliance, Community of Sahel-Saharan States, Economic Cooperation Organisation, Eurasian Economic Union).
4. Organizations with a medium level of institutional cooperation, but with which several socio-political elements are shared (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Association of Caribbean States, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the Economic Community of Central African States).
5. Organizations with small and very small states, far from Europe (Organization of East Caribbean States, East African Community, and Pacific Islands Forum).

6. Medium-established organizations with which political and institutional cooperation relations are maintained (Andean Community, South African Development Community, Economic Community of West African States, Common Market of East and Southern Africa).

The factors that contribute to the differentiation of these categories are described in the thesis. These six categories provide a concise picture, beyond individual cases, of the asymmetries in the European Union's relations with non-EU regional cooperation and integration organizations.

“Missing” regional organisations in the EU external relations. The case of the Eurasian Economic Union

There are a number of “missing” regional organizations in the EU's external relations. Cooperation exists mostly at the technical level in some sectors, although at the level of economic cooperation with these states is quite high compared to other regional arrangements. They are right next door to the European Union and are institutionally developed organizations.

The Eurasian Economic Union and the Economic Cooperation Organisation have developed formal, institutionalized agreements with other organizations in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. On the other hand, in the discussion on the European Union, an actor that supports regional integration, they remain non-existent. Their situation is complicated beyond the argument of (not) overlapping with the European interests in order to interact with them.

Both organizations have members who are not part of the World Trade Organization (Belarus, Iran, for example), making it impossible to negotiate direct bi-regional agreements between organizations. There are also protectionist organizations, focused mainly on increasing intra-regional trade, outside a system of open regionalisms. There are also political elements to consider: for example, the European side's request for conditioning with the Minsk Agreements - a geopolitical factor external to the two economic unions. Other arguments say that they express hegemonic projects, being political and economic instruments of some regional centers, or that they have weak regulatory and administrative capacities.

Using the case of the Eurasian Union as a case study, the main explanations for the lack of cooperation are explored. The Eurasian Economic Union is considered to be a result of the international dissemination of the EU model (Risse, 2015; Popescu, 2014). This does not necessarily mean easier cooperation between organizations, as there are sources for

competition and promotion of alternative models (Libman, 2019) - for example, by strengthening autocratic regimes instead of democratization.

The argument about their functioning in order to transmit in an attractive way the policy of an authoritarian center, with advantages for the centers and for the regimes there, is encountered and formulated in a credible and substantial way (Kneuer et. al., 2019).

The question arises as to whether these “missing” regions in the European Union's interregional cooperation are related to the fact that they are rather instruments or transmission belts for a number of authoritarian centers of gravity. To test this, the model of authoritarian centers of gravity is used to see if these premises are valid in shaping the external relations of the European Union with other regional organizations.

A scoreboard with eight similar organizations was built to see if there is any correlation between regional organizations developed on the model of authoritarian centers of gravity and the European Union's interregional cooperation.

The criteria extracted from the model (Kneuer et. al., 2018) are used as independent variables, referring to the characteristics of the target states and of the other centers within this organization. On the side of the dependent variables, there is the cooperation with the EU, operationalized through the EU funding for regional integration at the level of the organization, the existence of a treaty or agreement on political cooperation and partnership, the existence of a trade agreement between the parties. The result is that regional organizations with which the EU has no interregional relations are those based on the model of an authoritarian center that uses regional organizations as a tool for disseminating and transmitting authoritarian elements. The hypothesis is validated by the analysis of regional organizations dominated by a center of gravity.

In the case of the four cases of regional organizations for which, according to the scoreboard, authoritarian centers at the level of the regional organization have been identified, there are no interregional relations at the level of cooperation between these organizations and the European Union.

But there is another predictor of interregional cooperation between the EU and the regions concerned, unrelated to the authoritarian center of gravity. In this situation, the authoritarian center is better positioned in terms of “democracy” compared to an average of the other states. In other words, the average index of democracy at the level of states in the regional organizations with which there are no interregional relations is low, even lower than the authoritarian center. The situation is complementary to the tested scenario.

Conclusions, implications, and further research directions

The author's contribution through this approach shows in a comparative way how the regions are integrated through the representative regional cooperation and integration organizations, in the context of the foreign policy of the European Union, using a mix of research methods.

The thesis explores the interregional relations of the European Union and identifies the asymmetries between different interregional dyads with the EU at their center. The differences between them can be explained by institutional, political, economic factors, having several models of shaping the interregional links with non-European organizations. Three hypotheses structured the demonstration of the main research question, how the asymmetries between the EU's relations with other regional arrangements are constructed.

Firstly, interaction with the regions is not just a concern of key institutions in the area of foreign policy, as we would expect when it comes to external relations. Moreover, there is a history of interregional cooperation, beyond the level of cooperation with the states in those regions. Secondly, six models are identified that shows how the relationships with other regional organizations are developed and even integrated, based on 24 variables grouped under five subcomponents in a system of indicators. This comparison tool reveals distinct levels of development, institutionalization, and participation of the European Union in relations with other regional cooperation and integration organizations. Thirdly, the thesis succeeds in highlighting a number of policy instruments through which the EU supports or does not support various approaches to regional cooperation and integration, from existing strategies and the way it supports formal arrangements such as international organizations to setting precedents in the international arena and developing the capacities of similar organizations.

The contribution of this approach to the literature is given by the new character of a cross-cutting approach on the relevance of regional organizations in the construction of the European Union's foreign policy, based on a generally objective system for measuring the level of cooperation. In addition to the cross-cutting approach, a peculiarity of this approach was the introduction of the European institutions in the analysis showing how they develop interregional relations.

Taxonomically, the research agenda supported by this thesis corresponds to the fourth wave of "regionalisms" studies, the one of comparative regionalism, characterized by the study of global regions in a comparative perspective, but using a heterogeneous mixture of methods, research tools, theoretical and empirical perspectives.

The results lead to a number of academic, policy, and general implications. At the academic level, I recall the broadening of the research agenda in the field of study and research of regional integration processes, interactions between regions and regional cooperation and integration organizations, application of new methods in these areas and bringing concepts from other theoretical perspectives.

At *policy* level, the system of indicators allows for a relatively objective analysis of various aspects of the EU's external relations related to regions. A substantiated analysis is essential for setting the agenda within the public policy formulation processes, as well as for the overall formulation the public policy or monitoring its implementation. The index can also contribute to strengthening regional integration and to better targeting of the EU support, including through the allocated funding, to improve processes in those regions.

As underexplored research topics, based on the efforts supporting this thesis, I identify a time-based approach on the evolution of cooperation with different organisations, the contributions of the European institution to the consolidation of the interregional relations, the introduction of the continental dimension and the continental-level states in the analysis (African Union, Brazil, China, the United States), among others.

Annexes
Table of contents of the PhD thesis

Abstract	i
Originality declaration	iii
Conflicts of interest declaration	iv
Table of contents	1
List of abbreviations	4
List of tables	7
List of figures	8
SECTION I	9
<i>Introduction</i>	9
Relevance of the topic	10
Research motivation	11
Aim of research and research objectives	12
Hypotheses and research questions	13
Research contribution	16
Main assumptions	19
Structure of the thesis	23
<i>Theoretical aspects and conceptual framework</i>	25
English School Theory contributions on interregional relations analysis	25
EU as an international society. Regional international societies	28
Illustration of the multiple international societies	29
Insights from comparative regionalism	31
Regions and organisations in the international society	34
International order and regions	38
Typologies of cooperation relations between regions	40
Tensions in interregional cooperation	42
Concluding aspects	49
SECTION II	51
<i>The role of regions in the evolution of the European project</i>	51
International organisation from Dumberton Oaks to San Francisco	51
Regional organisation during the Cold War	55

The European Community and the external action (1970-1992)	68
Emergence of regions after the Cold War	76
European Union and the place of regions	78
European Union and the United Nations	87
Concluding aspects	93
<i>Participation of the EU institutions in the development of interregional relations</i>	96
EU's international agreements	96
The political architecture of regional dialogue	101
Financing interregional relations	112
The European Council: strategic, decision-making, and international cooperation roles	117
The Council: defining the cooperation framework with other regions	121
The European Commission: policy implementation and international cooperation	123
European External Action Service: external action coordination and cooperation	129
The European Parliament: political dialogue and interparliamentarism	131
The EU Court of Justice: legal review and dispute settlement	134
European Central Bank: cooperation with regional financial institutions	135
European Investment Bank: financing external projects and interregional partnerships	136
European Economic and Social Committee: opinions and support for counterparts	140
Committee of Regions: subnational interregional dialogue	142
Concluding aspects	145
<i>SECTION III</i>	147
<i>Measuring asymmetries in EU's cooperation with regional organisations</i>	147
An index of interregional cooperation	148
Sampling	148
Components and indicators	149
Justifying the selection of indicators	151
Data source	174
Data policy, hosting, and replication	174
Normalisation and standardization	176
Weighting and aggregation	177
Results	177
Interregional cooperation models	183
“Missing” regions and organisations	191
“Missing” regional organisations. The case of the Eurasian Economic Union	192

Eurasian Economic Union and the diffusion of the European model	193
Authoritarian gravity centers	203
Testing the authoritarian gravity center model in the case of Eurasian Union	204
Concluding aspects	213
<i>Conclusions, limits, further research directions</i>	<i>214</i>
Particularities of the thesis	215
Research limits	217
Academic and policy implications	219
Further research directions	221
<i>Bibliography and references</i>	<i>224</i>
Appendix	261
Annex I: Interregional relations dyads included in the index	261
Annex II: Indicators, definitions, calculation methods, data source	263
Annex III: Principal Component Analysis, component variation, weighting	270
Annex IV: Electronic database structure	276

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