



# Interregionalism and the European Union: a post-revisionist approach to Europe's place in a changing world

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Interregionalism and the European Union: a post-revisionist approach to Europe's place in a changing world**, by Mario Telò, Louise Fawcett, and Frederik Ponjaert, Abingdon, Routledge, 2015, xxvii + 486 pp., £32.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781472473264

The main puzzle tackled by this book is whether and how the European Union's (EU) interregional policies and historical precedents have enhanced or hampered drivers of regional cooperation in other regions. Thanks to this collective contribution, interregionalism is again considered a key element of the multiplex world. The book offers an ambitious, wide-ranging and up-to-date survey of interregionalism, and it sets the stage for further research into this field, which assumes increasing importance in coping with the challenges of a multipolar world.

The most innovative part of the edited volume is the "post-revisionist" approach, a novel theoretical approach that aims at going beyond the Euro-centric approach of "normative power Europe", but still looking at the Europe's distinctive integration process that continue to be referenced by other regional organizations. Therefore, this approach also aims at going beyond the more Euro-critical approach to interregionalism, which argues that "the only lesson to be drawn from the EU's experience of integration is that there are no lessons to be drawn". Recognizing that interregionalism is not a monopoly of the EU since a set of other powers and regional organizations have initiated various partnerships with regions belonging to other continents, this approach still considers the EU as key proponent of the regional option within the emerging multipolar system.

This detailed, well-written book is not just innovative in the theoretical approach proposed, but it also provides an innovative collection of fresh empirical analyses of interregional ties binding the EU with its

Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, Asia, Africa and the Americas. The volume is divided into five parts. The first part explores the post-revisionist approach to regionalism, while the four remaining parts are dedicated to the endogenous drivers – that is, de facto, de jure, cognitive and instrumental – of regional cooperation as identified in the New Regionalist literature.

How should we understand and locate European regionalism in the wider world of regionalism and multilateralism? How is the EU changing its internal and external policies towards other regions? And how do other regional groupings make reference to the EU's unprecedented institutional experience? These are the main questions the authors attempt to answer in the first part of the book. Three comparative, theoretical and historical perspectives are presented in this part, focusing on history, mutual learning, interregional relations and emulation mechanisms.

The second part of the book explores the impact of EU-sponsored interregional dynamics on de facto drivers of regionalism in other regions of the world. Regional cooperation is understood as cooperation driven by endogenous forces within the regional political economy. The three chapters, with a focus on the EU's interregional efforts towards East Asia, Latin America and Africa, answered the question "How the EU's purposeful external action has impacted the endogenous regionalization dynamics in its main partner regions?" Overall authors remain sceptical and consider the interregional policies and formats set up by the EU inadequate and characterized by a lack of strategic thinking.

The third part of the book explores the impact of EU's interregional policies on de jure drivers of regionalism. This part is developed in four chapters that address the question of whether interregional political dialogues in sensitive policy fields – that is, democracy promotion, migration, counter-terrorism and rule of law – have changed the institutionalized cooperation mechanisms or the legal environments in the EU's partner regions. The policies analysed by the authors were all shaped by the EU's experience of enlargement and its external action in these fields, in a process of externalization of its internal preferences. The continuity between the EU's interregional action in its near and far abroad is an interesting insight here.

The fourth part of the book focuses on the *cognitive* drivers of regional cooperation. The authors of the five chapters focus on whether local norms institutionalized within the EU's regional partners have proven to be catalysts or obstacles to the localization dynamics that the EU has hoped to see with regard to its preferred norms and regional preferences. Here both the multilateral stage (within the UN) and two specific regional environments (i.e. Asia and Africa) are analysed, identifying the three key factors which determine the EU's chances of seeing a given interregional effort lead to normative diffusion: the nature of the underlying norm, the level of institutionalization of the local cognitive priors and the regionally accepted praxis in international affairs.

The fifth part of the book focuses on the *instrumental* drivers of regionalism,

analysing whether the EU's strategic positioning in relations to other regions has proven to be a catalyst or an impediment to further regional cooperation. The analysis is conducted at multilateral, inter-organizational and bilateral levels.

The edited volume's chapters are characterized by a particular research question, which often entails a specific theoretical framework and a distinct research design. Nevertheless the overall structure and the study object of the book ensure a dialectic interaction among the different parts.

In general, the edited volume successfully address three main points: (1) it elaborates of a post-revisionist epistemic approach; (2) it bridges the EU studies and comparative regionalism, to allow the assessments of interregionalism as a component of the EU's external action and (3) it offers a novel functional assessment of interregionalism's impact, focusing on the various drivers of cooperation in target regions. In sum, the volume contributes towards both a re-evaluation and synthesis of existing approaches towards regionalism and interregionalism, placing them in the twenty-first century, and repositioning the EU within such an increasingly multilayered and complex global context.

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