Regional Cooperation: Conflict Prevention and Security through Interdependence

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Introduction

According to the Secretariat of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), there are 88 individual, regional trade agreements currently in force (Fischer, 1998). Not less than 77 new preferential trade agreements on the regional level have been registered from 1992 to 1996 (Denman, 1998). Virtually all 132 members of the WTO now participate in at least one agreement to advance regional trade liberalisation in goods and services (Fischer, 1998). Twenty-five per cent of global output is being exported (Ruggiero, 1998). World trade growth doubled from 4 per cent per annum between 1980 and 1993 to 8 per cent in 1994-1996, outpacing world output growth by a widening margin (Fischer, 1998). "Recent trends in intra-regional and extra-regional trade allow for some tentative conclusions, according to *"Intereconomics"*, on whether regional trade rather than global networking was the dominant feature in the world economy during the 1980s and early 1990s" (Fischer, 1998, 164).

The phenomenon of regionalisation needs to be analysed not only in terms of economic processes underway, but also in terms of its implications for possibilities to increase the role of regional arrangements and agencies in the maintenance of international peace and security, in general, and in the prevention of intra-state conflicts in the post-Cold War world, in particular. As the same time, it is important to assess the pattern of actual interaction of regional and global approaches to maintenance of security and its sustainability. The problems of security on national, regional and global levels are acquiring qualitatively new dimensions after the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of one of the 'superpowers', and its consequent collapse of the bipolar system of international relations, foreign policy doctrines of many countries around the globe started to evolve.

It is only partly true that all these large-scale foreign policy changes, in so many states, have originated from the disintegration of the 'superpower' Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation. It is also true that these changes in world politics are going on intact with the radical transformation of societies in the former Soviet Republics and the USSR's allied countries all over the world. This transformation of societies toward widening democratic freedoms and market economies creates more favourable preconditions for integration processes between like-minded states, with compatible systems of market economies. These preconditions result in the creation of an expanding network of regional and sub-regional organisations of different kinds as well as in the deepening of mutual economic and political interdependences between participating

states, having an obvious impact on the formation of future security architectures on a regional level, and on entire grounds upon which regional security systems will rely. Furthermore, a novel system of international relations is gradually emerging, providing better conditions for prevention of both inter- and intra-state violent conflicts and for partnership relations not only among contemporary states, but also between different regional groupings and organisations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Experiences of the Recent Past

While designing the security system after World War II, the founders of the United Nations (UN) envisaged a possibility of pacific settlement of local disputes through regional arrangements or by regional agencies before referring them to the Security Council (Article 52.2 of the UN Charter). On the other hand, the Security Council in its turn, "must encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes", by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned, or by reference from the Security Council (Article 52.3). As far as enforcement actions under its authority are concerned, the Security Council (SC) may utilise such regional arrangements or agencies for these purposes, but no enforcement action shall be taken by them, without the authorisation of the SC. The Security Council "shall at all times be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security." (Article 54).

The efficiency of the security system, established after World War II, on both global and regional levels, was dependent on the ability of the permanent members of the Security Council to cooperate and to undertake effective collective measures. However, due to the confrontation between some of its permanent members during the Cold War, the Security Council was unable to do so. This means that the regional aspects of the systems of international peace and security, stipulated particularly in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, could not work in the way that they had been designed by the UN's founding fathers.

By the existing military-political realities the UN member states were forced to seek an efficient substitute for the functions of the Security Council as the main 'peace-keeper' and to establish a network of bilateral and multilateral military-political alliances in different regions of the world. The regional military-political alliances could not be qualified as regional arrangements and agencies, corresponding to the conditions of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter: pacific settlement of local disputes before referring them to the Security Council was not the main incentive for establishing them. These bilateral military agreements and multilateral regional military-political alliances had to be able to repulse a military threat to security of their members, posed by hostile states and alliances in accordance to Article 51 of the UN Charter (concerning the right to individual and collective self-defence).

The confrontation between East and West was based on the perception that the other social system was a threat to the basic values of human society. This polarised the world

along political, military, economic, cultural and ideological lines. Pacific settlement of this basic contradiction was out of the question. The 'superpowers' and their allies tried to enlarge their spheres of influence among developing countries, where two thirds of the world's population lives, by convincing them to support and select a particular type of socio-economic and political development and turning them in this way into their 'clients'. The quest for the unity and cohesion of the military-political alliances within the common strategy of confrontation with adversaries gave birth to attempts, not only to achieve military cooperation between allied countries, but also to consolidate their political, economic, technological, scientific, cultural and ideological policies. Such an approach precluded any productive interaction, not to mention, integration between 'antipodes': they were considered unfeasible, dangerous and counter-productive.

Attempts from the 'superpowers' to 'cement' the unity of the allied countries by setting a common economic basis for the international strategy of the alliances, through promoting integration processes between their member states, cannot be characterised as a success story. Neither North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), nor the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) were properly 'equipped' to implement this task. Strong political and military incentives for this were not able to bridge the gap. As a result, processes of regional economic cooperation and integration started to develop outside frames of the military-political alliances in Europe, namely within the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). It is important to emphasise that under conditions of the Cold War, these integration processes, as far as their participants were concerned, continued to follow the pattern of confrontation and were taking place separately in the East and the West.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki in August 1975, and the approval of the Final Act of the CSCE, were important milestones on the way to overcoming the East-West confrontation in Europe. The CSCE was a successful attempt of European states, the USA and Canada to determine a kind of 'rules of conduct' in regulating hostile relations between the competing military-political alliances under conditions of 'Cold War', in order to prevent their transformation into a military conflict or 'hot war'.

At the same time, the emergence of the CSCE manifested an initial state of formation of a new type of a regional organisation, one which was universal in terms of participating states across the East-West confrontation line and the scope of problems with which it had to deal. The Final Act of the Helsinki Conference in August 1975 constituted these 'rules of conduct' as the basic framework for construction of a system of European Security and Cooperation. This framework included also principles of economic and technological cooperation and interaction between the CSCE states. But at that moment, i.e. in the middle of the 1970s, these principles were more a declaration of intent than a real basis for development of integration processes on a pan-European level: apart from the obvious political obstacles to be overcome they declared development of mutual beneficial economic

and technological cooperation between states with incompatible economic and political systems.

Actual transformation of political and economic systems in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and in the newly independent states on the territory of the former USSR does promote the removal of these obstacles for the formation of a common European economic space. The forms, content and directions of the so-called 'socialist economic integration' were determined by ideological and political motives. Integration ties were planned and implemented by bureaucratic methods through centralised systems of economic management, without proper consideration of their economic profitability and expediency. Such a politically predetermined, planned 'integration' turned out to be quite artificial and not promoting real and deep economic interdependence between states involved, in contrast to integration processes between politically independent democratic states as directed by their national interests and, consequently, by the most profitable economic solutions within the market economy. Cooperative economic ties, based predominantly on political and ideological grounds and without a base of parallel economic interests, turn out to be precarious and short-lived.

With the end of the Cold War, the political tasks of the 'socialist economic integration' fell away, but any deep interdependence between member states in the economic field, which would have induced them not only to keep, but also to strengthen political cooperation, had not been created. COMECON fell apart and its member states did not demonstrate any strong interest to preserve it. The collapse of their cooperation in the military-political field as well as the gradual drift of the former COMECON countries towards integration with the European Union, should be seen as quite a logical outcome of the 'socialist' pattern of integration.

Integration processes within the European Union (EU) were based on regulation of economic problems in the interests of politically-independent, democratic member states under conditions of a market economy. The experiences of integration processes, gained within the EU, demonstrate that they were developing - although not without difficulties, contradictions and even crises - but invariably progressively, and so they promoted the emergence of broad spheres of common, coinciding or interwoven interests of their citizens, businessmen, banking circles and state structures. In this way, *a critical mass of mutual interdependence* was being formed gradually and 'from below', which, at a certain stage, gave birth to the necessity of deepening cooperation among member states also in other fields, including political, monetary, financial, social, legislative. Now this cooperation tends to include problems of security and defence.

The formation of the EU as a regional arrangement was initiated by the agreement of the states involved to deepen economic interaction between themselves in certain fields of common interest. The need to develop further economic cooperation in order to make it efficient and profitable for all countries involved was the main incentive for them to widen and enlarge cooperation in other non-economic fields. Of course, the development of such regional organisations is a time- and labour-consuming process of balancing economic

interests of participating states. But every step forward in this direction increases the foundations for stable and peaceful relations between the participating states in the long-term perspective.

The deep and broad interdependence of the EU member states made the risk of violent resolution of *interstate* disputes and contradictions, within the EU, irrational and non-existent. Due to weighty economic reasons any attempt to resolve such disputes and contradictions by violent means would have brought too large and painful damage to all sides involved. This inspired them to look after political, economic and other pacific means of settlement for disputes and contradictions, making this way of such a settlement the most efficient and least expensive. While doing so, they did not even think to refer their disputes to the UN Security Council.

These mechanisms have already promoted the erosion of military tools of conflict settlement between the participating states. The West European countries (members of the EU) are opening their borders to each other and gradually reducing their frontier guard formations inside the EU. Inner-European border controls within the EU are planned to fall away completely. A single currency and broadly uniform economic policy within the EU would not be possible without a considerable degree of political integration (see Elliott, 1997).

The ongoing integration processes of such a comprehensive magnitude, as within the EU, in combination with other European legal and institutional arrangements create pre-conditions for the prevention of deadly *intra-state* conflicts, as well by ensuring free movement of persons; freedom of establishment of nationals of a member state in the EU in the territory of another member state; close collaboration between member states in the social field, particularly in matters relating to employment, labour legislation and working conditions, occupational and continuation training; social security; the enjoyment and protection of the rights of migrant workers from the EU states, under the conditions granted by each state to its own nationals. All these and many other regulations of this kind are strictly observed and implemented by different EU institutions, such as the European Commission, the European Council, Council of Ministers and Committee of Permanent Representatives, European Parliament, Court of Justice of the European Communities, European Social Fund, European Training Foundations, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and by other national and international bodies. These measures contain and limit considerably the very possibility of different political forces inside EU member states to misuse nationalistic, ethnic, or religious motives, as well as phobia of foreigners and migrants, in their political aspirations.

War has become unthinkable among the countries of the EU. Helmut Kohl, as the German Chancellor, in one of his speeches rightly stated: "European integration is in reality a question of war and peace in the 21st Century .." (Elliott, 1997, 4). The objective set by the founding fathers of the UN in the Chapter VIII of the UN Charter before the regional agencies and organisations in the sphere of pacific settlement of conflicts is being practically achieved, not as a result of diplomatic efforts of state authorities, but as an outcome of

development of economic integration processes within the EU, which caused far-reaching consequences for the international relations of all countries and nations involved. Involvement of different countries, people and territories in similar integration processes, also on regional and sub-regional levels, with proper legal, institutional and financial arrangements, can result in a long-term perspective in the creation of a firm ground for the prevention and peaceful settlement of both inter-and intra-state disputes and deadly conflicts. This is the most promising way for gradual enlargement of a peace and sustainable security zone to include all parts of Europe.

The Challenges for the Countries of Eastern Europe

The EU forms one of the key institutions within the regional European Security Architecture, whose functions cannot be substituted for the member states by any other organisation or grouping in Europe. Similar functions, at least theoretically, can be acquired by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the future, the EU not only will continue to enlarge by integrating new members, but will also acquire some additional functions. Under the Treaty on a European Political Union, the member states pledged to work toward the framing of a common defence policy which might, in time, lead to a common defence, compatible with that of the Atlantic Alliance. The EU is developing its own security and defence identity, not necessarily because the security arrangements provided by NATO to its EU members are considered by the latter as insufficient.

The political integration of EU member states is going on outside the frames of NATO and will have its autonomous dynamic of development and independent economic ground also in the future. This means that the development of a common foreign and security policy within the framework of European integration processes is not similar to the processes rooted in the post-Cold War evolution of NATO. Even from this point of view, NATO cannot be deemed to be a universal all-European security arrangement for the future. Formally, the European members of NATO did not resist the development of the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) *within* the Alliance at this stage of its evolution, but at the same time, some of the EU members are undertaking different initiatives aimed at gradually building a common European defence policy.

On the eve of the 40th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, six EU members (France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Luxembourg) launched a joint initiative, calling for all 15 EU members to eventually subscribe to the mutual-security guarantee contained in the founding Treaty of the Western European Union (WEU) Defence group. The thrust of the proposal is to gradually incorporate the 10-nation WEU in the EU "to make defence no longer a theory, but a real prospect" (*International Herald Tribune*, 1997, March 25, 5). In this context, it is worth mentioning that in May 1994, associate partnership status was granted by the WEU to Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

The initiative to gradually incorporate the WEU into the EU, "reflects the long-standing ambition of continental countries", wrote Tom Buerkle, "to win greater independence from American tutelage and to give Europe military strength equal to its economic might" (Buerkle, 1997, 5). No doubt that prospective Central and Eastern European members of the EU will strengthen this long-lasting ambition, challenging aspirations of the NATO leader to be the determining force of a new European Security Architecture. However, the EU is not yet the all-European institution and will hardly become this in a medium-term perspective. It provides above-mentioned merits and advantages only to member states directly and to those states and peoples who aspire to enter the EU, indirectly. The understandable inclination of many post-communist states to utilise the tried and tested methods of development within the EU to the benefit of their countries and peoples, inspires them to integrate with the EU.

Under conditions of acute internal opposition between different political forces in new democracies of Central and Eastern European countries, the establishment of a firm legislative ground for successful economic, political, social, technological, and cultural development, is a too painful and time-consuming process, which nonetheless, does not ensure the optimal course of economic and political reforms and reliable security arrangements. Prospects of being integrated into the EU create commonly acceptable streamlines for economic, social, legislative, ecological development of these countries, in view of the necessity to adjust it to the demands of the EU, constitute a factor of stabilisation of their political life, by promoting the formation of consensus in these countries on the problems of their domestic development.

This creates qualitatively new perspectives for widening democratic freedoms in many countries and strengthening integration processes between *like-minded* states, with *compatible systems* of *market economies*. This means that a consistent course of Central and Eastern European countries towards integration with the EU is deemed to be the optimal way of lessening the burden of transition and of speeding up the socio-economic progress of these countries. Possible membership of Central and Eastern European countries in the EU will undoubtedly correspond to their long-term strategic interests. But to become true, this perspective requires extensive, expensive and time-consuming efforts to adjust their economic, social, financial, legislative and other systems to those of the EU. By doing so, these countries are creating preconditions for conflict prevention and settlement, existing within the EU, in their own states, as well as in a larger part of Europe.

At the same time, EU membership is not available for countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the short-term perspective. The EU would not include some of the former Warsaw Pact members before 2002 at the earliest. The formal support of NATO enlargement to the East helps the EU to delay real negotiations with the Eastern Europeans on entry to the Union to the moment when not only Eastern Europeans, but also the EU itself, will be better suited to accept and integrate new members.

On the way to their strategic goal, namely the membership in the EU, countries of Central and Eastern Europe are entering different regional and sub-regional agreements with

other European states in order to join an all-European economic space (see Bulajic, 1998). There are several sub-regional cooperation links, associations and groupings with the participation of CESEC countries, which are already part of overall integration processes:

* Council of Barents/Euro-Atlantic region includes six member states (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Finland and Sweden) and nine observers (Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, Poland, France, USA and Japan.
* The Baltic Sea States Council unites nine states (Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Estland) with a population of more than 300 million.
* The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Council consists of 11 states (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine) with a population of more than 300 million.
* The Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA) attracted six countries, (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Romania) with a population of 65 million.
* The Central European Initiative is supported by 16 countries with a population of about 250 million (Austria, Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Croatia and the Czech Republic) (Fischer, 1998).

Other sub-regional groupings with participation of the former republics of the USSR are also taking shape.

The member states of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Council (BSECC), in the Declaration of Intent, concerning an establishment of a Black Sea free-trade zone, accepted in Istanbul on February 7, 1997, confirmed their aspiration to develop mutual economic cooperation, seen by them as their contribution to the creation of an all-European economic space and as a step forward towards greater integration of the participating states into the world economy (*Diplomaticheskyi Vestnik*, 1997). According to the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, V.V. Posuvaliok, "Russia assumes that the Black Sea free-trade zone shall become a part of a new European architecture, free from any dividing lines in economic and military political matters" (*Diplomaticheskyi Vestnik*, 1997, 22).

Different sub-regional economic groupings with participation of both CIS members and other states outside the Commonwealth may be helpful for development of integration ties not only inside the CIS, but also in a broader perspective. By doing so, they can promote a formation of deep interdependences among states involved with all consequences for peace, security and stability, resulting from these interdependences. Further development of such sub-regional cooperation and integration in different parts of Europe is an efficient means, promoting the formation of an all-European economic space.

This all-European economic space in making may lay down a firm economic ground for the peace-making activities of the OSCE, which no longer regulates hostile relations between rival states, but is constructing a new pattern of international relations and sustainable security order in Europe, by concerted efforts of all pan-European, European regional and sub-regional organisations, trans-Atlantic institutions and like-minded European states. Participation of individual countries in several sub-regional economic agreements is a commonly accepted practice today. This helps them to get more deeply involved in a broad network of international economic cooperation and by doing so to contribute to the creation of such a system of multi-lateral interdependencies, within which any attempts to 'settle' disputes and conflicts by violent means would be harmful to all sides concerned.

Concluding Remarks

Involvement of individual states in different sub-regional agreements helps 'construct bridges' between these sub-regional groupings and form an extensive network of intra-regional agreements and cooperative ties, in a broader sense. This is not an exclusively European phenomenon. Regionalisation has gained momentum in the last two decades all over the world involving economies at all levels of development. The regional agreements vary in coverage, scope and completeness (see Fischer, 1998). Regional trade agreements of different coverage, scope and completeness are spreading, enlarging and deepening over the last decades.

The obvious trend towards the intensification of cooperation on intra-regional levels is gaining momentum. After the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by the USA, Canada and Mexico, the exploration of possibilities for cooperation and interaction between NAFTA and the EU in the form of a Transatlantic Free Trade Area - TAFTA - has intensified. TAFTA supporters point out that the combined US-EU GDP represents 57 per cent of the total world GDP (Barfield, 1998). The USA and NAFTA would like to establish a free-trade zone on the whole American continent - a Free Trade Area of the Americas - by 2005 and by doing so, integrate NAFTA and other regional and sub-regional groupings like CARICOM, MERCOSUR, the Andean group and other Central American and Latin American groups. This free-trade area would come in at about 70 per cent of the world GDP (Barfield, 1998). The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) gathers together 18 countries with 2.1 billion people, including the USA, Japan, China and the 'Asian Tigers' It realises about 55% of global GNP and 45% of global trade. This grouping should be enlarged by 2000 with 10 Asian and Latin American countries and possibly Russia (Bulajic, 1998). On the basis of the Lomé conventions, the EU continues its economic cooperation with 71 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP). Annual summits of 15 European and 10 Asian states are discussing means of improving cooperation between the EU and ACEAN on the intra-regional basis.

Some of the regional and sub-regional economic arrangements started to take part in conflict prevention and conflict settlement activities in their regions as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) itself and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Asia, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Maghreb Arab Union in Africa are doing, to name but a few. At the same time, such a continental organisation as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) is entering its third decade as a continental conflict management forum. In 1991 state representatives and private citizens of Africa convened at the African Leadership Forum, in cooperation with the OAU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and adopted the charter of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), which has the OSCE as an example. Regional organisations of a political nature are still playing a tremendous role in conflict prevention and settlement activities in different parts of the world. Processes of economic integration on a regional level are able to do the same, but by other, non-military and non-violent means.

Through integration processes at a regional level, development of ties between different regional groups and their individual participants, as well as through the liberalisation of world trade and the activity of multi-national corporations, the firm ground for a highly-integrated and interdependent, future world economy, is being laid.

Ties of integration and mutual interdependency among contemporary states are being formed over a long period. Their impact on conflict prevention is felt from a short-term perspective, not simultaneously in different parts of the world. Promoting such integration processes has to be considered as one of the most important elements of a long-term strategy of conflict prevention and stability strengthening.

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