

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO THE PHENOMENON OF NEW REGIONALISM

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Abstract. *The phenomenon of "new regionalism" represents a contemporary trend in the analysis of international relations and territorial development, emerging in the context of global transformations after the end of the Cold War. Unlike "old regionalism," which was mainly focused on formal economic integration between states, new regionalism is multidimensional, encompassing economic, political, cultural, social, and security aspects. It is no longer solely state-driven, but also involves non-state actors such as NGOs, local authorities, and subnational regions.*

In theoretical perspective, new regionalism is analyzed through various paradigms—from neoliberalism to constructivism—that highlight growing interdependencies and the fragmentation of the traditional international order. The process is influenced by globalization, which does not diminish the importance of regions but rather reconfigures them as strategic actors in global networks. A "bottom-up" orientation is observed in the formation of regional identities and interests, with emphasis on complementarity and interregional cooperation.

New regionalism is often perceived as a form of alternative governance, adaptable to local contexts yet connected to global dynamics. Therefore, it provides a relevant theoretical and practical framework for understanding the new forms of regional organization in a multipolar and complex world.

Keywords: *region, regionalization, new regionalism, international relations*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of the new regionalism emerged as a response to the major geopolitical and economic transformations of recent decades, marked by the end of the Cold War, the advance of globalization, and the diversification of international relations. Whereas classical regionalism was associated with strongly institutionalized political and economic structures, such as the European Union or the Economic Community of West African States, the new regionalism is characterized by its flexibility, its orientation toward multidimensional cooperation, and the integration of non-state actors, including international organizations, NGOs, and the private sector. In an increasingly interdependent and complex global context, regions have become essential actors in shaping the international order, not only from an economic perspective but also in areas

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such as security, environmental protection, sustainable development, and human rights. The new regionalism is no longer a process of economic integration, but rather a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses political, social, and cultural dimensions, where cooperation is conceived both as a response to shared challenges and as a means of constructing a distinct regional identity.

For a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of the concept of “*new regionalism*”, as well as of the impact this phenomenon exerts on international relations, it is necessary to analyze the ways in which this term has been conceptualized in the specialized literature. In this regard, the present research, which focuses on the analysis of the conceptual and theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon of “*new regionalism*”, as well as on highlighting the main dimensions of the relationship “*new regionalism - regionalization - region*”, is based on the use of a set of general and specific research methods.

Accordingly, the methods of analysis and deduction, the phenomenological method, the historical method, the comparative method, and the webographic method were employed. The method of analysis and deduction enabled a systematic examination of the main theoretical approaches to the concepts of “*region*”, “*regionalization*”, and “*new regionalism*”, thereby contributing to the clarification of the conceptual relationships among them.

The use of the webographic method facilitated the investigation of the research subject at both the theoretical and practical levels, through the consultation of major academic and institutional sources available online, which contributed to a deeper understanding of the issue under examination. At the same time, the comparative method made it possible to critically analyze the concept of “*new regionalism*” in relation to the concepts of “*regionalization*” and “*region*”, highlighting both conceptual and functional convergences and divergences.

The application of the phenomenological method allowed for an in-depth analysis of the conceptual and theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon of “*new regionalism*”, by capturing its essential dimensions and the meanings attributed to it across various analytical contexts. Simultaneously, the use of the historical method ensured the examination of the specific conditions and transformations occurring within the international system, providing the necessary framework for analyzing the historical evolution of the issue and for understanding the circumstances that led to the emergence and consolidation of the concept of “*new regionalism*”.

1. CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO THE PHENOMENA OF “REGION,” “REGIONALIZATION,” AND “REGIONALISM”

The contemporary international landscape is profoundly influenced by multiple processes, with globalization and regionalism emerging as particularly significant. For deeper understanding of the correlation between region-regionalization-regionalism, it is necessary to define these concepts from a theoretical perspective. Such an analysis establishes the logical framework that clarifies the key points, highlights the elements of interest, and delineates the scientific boundaries while also outlining the interaction among *region*, *regionalization*, and *regionalism*.

Starting from the most widespread scientific interpretations of the term *region*, it must be noted that the scholarly literature does not provide a single universally accepted definition. Over time, various definitions have been elaborated depending on different contexts and approaches. John Fraser Hart emphasizes this lack of standardization,

suggesting that regions are essentially “subjective artistic devices” (Hart). In turn, Klaus Roth (Roth, Brunnbauer, 2010) in his analyses of the concept of region, identifies two essential characteristics: internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Based on this understanding, he proposes a classification of regions into several categories: micro-regions, meso-regions, macro-regions, and global regions.

Anne Gilbert, examining the phenomenon of region, advances three possible approaches to the notion: “the region as a local response to processes occurring within a given space/territory; the region as a point of identification; and the region as a milieu of social interactions” (Gilbert). Regarding typologies of regions, she argues that they can be classified according to their level of scale: national, continental, and global. From a geographical perspective, the concept of region may also be defined on the basis of specific features such as relief (e.g., a lowland region) or climate (e.g., an arid region). When approached from an economic perspective, the definition does not entirely exclude the geographical criterion; thus, a region may be understood as “a functional spatial unit characterized by the relations among the economic actors that constitute it, as well as by the relations these actors establish with other regions, which can be empirically measured” (Gilbert).

At the supranational level, in this case within the European Union, there is a declared tendency toward strengthening the role of regional policy, and consequently, of the region itself. Yet even at this level, no single standard or operational definition exists. For instance, the definition adopted by the Assembly of European Regions is purely descriptive, characterizing the region as a “territorial public entity situated at the level immediately below that of the state and endowed with its own political powers”.

The establishment of the Committee of the Regions through the Maastricht Treaty further highlighted the impossibility of formulating a common institutional definition of the concept of region, given that its members were “representatives of regional and local communities,” appointed unanimously by the Council on the basis of proposals submitted by the Member States, each according to its own territorial structures. When the notion of region is examined in the context of debates on structural funds, it designates a space rather than an institution, serving as the basic unit of regional development.

To formulate the most appropriate and functional definition of the term “region”, it is essential to take into account the specific purpose it is meant to serve. Thus, the term “region” may be understood as a geographical area represented by an entity about which significant generalizations can be made that apply to the entire area viewed as a unified whole. A region may be defined as an area or territory characterized by a set of distinct internal features, whether physical or human, that provide it with a certain meaningful unity while, at the same time, distinguishing it from neighboring areas. The number of criteria that may contribute to the delimitation of a region is unlimited-ranging from physical attributes and socio-economic characteristics to linguistic features and beyond-while the typology of regions is equally diverse, encompassing metropolitan regions, geographical regions, historical regions, and others.

On the international arena, regions may be established:

-on the basis of connections between the border areas of neighboring states, as exemplified by the creation of Euroregions: the East Border Region (United Kingdom/Ireland); the Ems-Dollart Region (Germany/Netherlands); Espace Mont Blanc (France/Italy/Switzerland); the Tatry Euroregion (Poland/Slovakia); the Strymon-

Stouma Euroregion (Bulgaria/Greece); and the Black Sea Euroregion, which brings together local and regional authorities from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Ukraine;

- *on the basis of shared economic, commercial, cultural, or other interests*, which lead to the establishment of regions formed by groups of states located within a well-defined geographical area. Examples include the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland) and the Pacific/Southeast Asian region (South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore).

Thus, according to the definition provided by the *Illustrated Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, a region is understood as: 1) a large expanse of land, more or less homogeneous, within a country or in another part of the world, displaying common characteristics (relief, climate, waters, economic resources); a district or area; and 2) an administrative-territorial unit comprising several districts (raioane) and one or more major cities (DEXI: 2007).

According to the *Community Charter of Regionalization (Carta Comunitară a Regionalizării)* a development region is understood as a territory which, from a geographical perspective, constitutes a distinct unit, or a comparable set of territories marked by continuity, where the population shares certain common elements and seeks to preserve and further develop its specific identity, with the purpose of stimulating cultural, social, and economic progress.”

In the view of the Council of Europe, a “region” is an administrative-territorial unit situated immediately below the level of the state, whether unitary, federal, or otherwise, endowed with an elected public authority and possessing financial resources to sustain that authority. Within this framework, the Council of Europe defined the “region” as “a medium-sized territorial unit that can be geographically delimited and is regarded as homogeneous.” This definition emphasizes the interconnection between territory and the human element inhabiting it, the latter reflecting an awareness of the region’s homogeneity. Within the European Union, regions are entrusted with the role of supporting the consolidation of the economic unity of the Member States and of reducing disparities among them: namely, “...to strengthen the unity of their economies and ensure their harmonious development, while reducing the gap between different regions and the backwardness of the less-favored” (Preamble to the Treaty of Rome, 1957). Under European Union legislation, a “region” represents “the level immediately below that of the state”-a tier which, depending on the competences conferred within centralized systems, or assumed within federal systems, exercises administrative and political authority over a territorial community of widely varying size.

The most important programmatic document in this regard is the Declaration on Regionalism in Europe, adopted in 1996 (*Declarația asupra regionalismului în Europa*). The Declaration sets out the norms and criteria to be achieved in regional development and establishes the necessary steps for recognizing the region as a political actor. Article 10, paragraph 2, stipulates that “regions encourage cooperation among themselves, on a bilateral or multilateral scale, both within the state and across borders, for the realization of common projects.” Furthermore, “regions have the right to establish their own representation, either individually or jointly with other regions, in other states and before other competent international organizations” (p.3), and they may participate in the international activities of their state, in accordance with the relevant domestic legal provisions, whenever such activities concern their competences or their fundamental

interests (p.4). According to paragraph 5, “Before the conclusion of an international treaty affecting the fundamental interests of the regions, they shall be consulted by the state. If the state intends to conclude international treaties in areas pertaining to regional competences, the regions shall participate, together with the state, in the drafting and conclusion of such treaties. The modalities of such participation are determined by internal procedures agreed upon between the state and its regions. The implementation of a treaty is ensured following the allocation of competences between the state and its regions” (*Declarația asupra regionalismului în Europa*).

With regard to the vision of the institutional architecture of the European Union (Art. 12, para. 4), “where the matter at issue falls within the exclusive competence of the region or directly involves its particular interests, the state may not deviate from the position established by the region, except where domestic law requires such deviation for reasons of integrity. In such cases, the state must provide justification for any departure from the region’s position. The region also enjoys the right to participate in the decision-making process of the Community institutions and, in particular, to designate a representative to be included in the national delegation” (*Declarația asupra regionalismului în Europa*). The Council of Europe has defined a region as “a medium-sized territorial unit that can be geographically delineated and is regarded as homogeneous” (*Declarația asupra regionalismului în Europa*). This definition emphasizes the intrinsic link between the territory and the human element, the latter manifesting as an awareness of the region homogeneous character.

Formulating a definition of the “region” that enjoys universal acceptance proves particularly challenging, owing to the diversity of perspectives from which this notion is approached. Nevertheless, the definitions advanced by European institutions contain a number of common elements. These include, above all, the spatial dimension (with boundaries that may be more or less clearly defined), the human community occupying that space and possessing specific characteristics, a certain degree of unity or identity, as well as the competences attributed to the region. Regions may acquire a variety of meanings: a region may be defined as an area within a territory that possesses a consistent set of internal characteristics, whether physical or human, that provide it with a significant degree of unity, distinguishing it from neighboring areas. The number of criteria that may contribute to the delimitation of a region is virtually unlimited: physical attributes, socio-economic features, linguistic characteristics, among others. Equally diverse are the types of regions: densely populated regions, declining regions, geographical regions, historical regions, natural regions, planning regions, underdeveloped regions, etc. From an analytical perspective, the concept of regionalization regards the region as one of the most effective forms of spatial organization of information, while functional regions are considered of major importance for both the process and the objectives of development planning.

A region encompasses a part of a territory (state, continent, geographical area, etc.) characterized by certain specific features, together with the community inhabiting that territory. The term “region” has an extremely broad scope of application. Three main categories of regions can be distinguished:

- regions within states;
- regions comprising several states within a given geographical area (e.g., Benelux, the Visegrad Group, the group of Black Sea countries);

- cross-border regions, which bring together geographical areas situated on either side of state borders, linked by tradition, language, religion, culture, and other commonalities.

Regions that form part of states acquire particular significance when viewed through the lens of the stages to be undertaken by Member States and associated states of the European Union. On the one hand, the principle of equal treatment is ensured in terms of financial support provided by the EU to both Member States and their regions; on the other hand, such arrangements create opportunities for effective cooperation between regions belonging to different states. Following the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty, regions effectively became one of the pillars of European integration. Today, Europe is composed of a genuine mosaic of regions. Regions represent the outcome of the socio-economic and cultural diversity inherent in European society (Sienerth).

Thus, the region has become the fundamental basis of economic and social life, as well as the foundation of economic development. Amid the globalization of economic relations and the growing mobility of capital, regions and localities across different states have found themselves in fierce international competition to attract the highest possible share of investment (Bădescu, 1997: 32).

In the scholarly literature, the concepts of “regionalization” and “regionalism” are frequently employed, both referring to processes and phenomena that structure, defining regional dynamics (ibidem). Regionalism represents a bottom-up movement corresponding to the aspiration of communities to assume responsibility for solving problems that directly affect them (Constantin, 2000). It reflects the awareness of common interests, with the region perceived as a territory considered homogeneous by its inhabitants, coupled with their aspiration to participate in the management of these interests. Such a regional community is regarded as more capable of addressing these issues than the state, which is often seen as too distant and too large, accused of imposing a centralized model upon local particularities, and lacking the appropriate scale to resolve regional problems effectively. By contrast, regionalization is a top-down process, characterized by different objectives and distinct implementation mechanisms compared to those of regionalism. This fundamental distinction reappears at each stage of the so-called “regional process.” In response to regionalist movements, the state may recognize a regional identity (with the region now perceived as a territory considered homogeneous by the state) and adopt the necessary measures to enable regions to participate in the management of their own affairs. The starting point of regionalization lies in regional imbalances, or in the recognition of such imbalances (Bantuş-Gurduza). The term regionalization is generally understood as the creation of a new level of territorial organization within a state. The new institutions may vary considerably in terms of bodies, responsibilities, and powers, yet they are always established in relation to existing local institutions.

The process of regionalization has evolved differently from one country to another, depending on the form of state organization (unitary or federal), the legislative framework, ethnic composition, and historical traditions. It should also be emphasized that regionalization in each country is shaped by its specific context-legal, economic, social, demographic, and ethnic-as well as by its historical traditions.

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*) regionalization is defined as “division into regions or administrative districts.” Regionalization is often confused with regionalism and, by some, perceived as a potential

threat to national sovereignty. The Illustrated Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (*DEXI*, 2007: 1654) defines regionalization as “the action of regionalizing and its result”.

In both the specialized literature and the practice of international relations, the phenomenon of regionalism is also widely present. Regionalism refers to the awareness of common interests, where the region is perceived as a homogeneous territory by its inhabitants combined with the aspiration to participate in the management of these interests (Şipkov, 2015:88-90). In other words, it reflects the emergence of a community that considers itself capable of addressing local problems, in contrast to the state, often perceived as too distant or too large. Regionalization, by contrast, originates in regional imbalances or in the awareness of such imbalances. The state may, in this regard, recognize a regional identity, where the region is perceived as a homogeneous territory by the state itself and adopt measures enabling regions to participate in the management of their own affairs.

Regionalism is often understood as a term with a dual meaning: “a top-down movement (regionalization) and a bottom-up movement (regionalism)” (Mihailescu). Both concepts describe dynamics at the regional level that interact with one another (Dezalay, 1998: 197-219). Regionalism, as a bottom-up process, reflects the profound aspiration of communities to assume responsibility for addressing issues that concern them directly. It embodies the awareness of shared interests, where the region is perceived as a homogeneous territory by its inhabitants together with the aspiration to participate in managing these interests (Muntschick, 2025). Such regional community considers itself more capable of resolving these matters than the state, which is often perceived as too distant and too large, accused of imposing a centralized model that disregards local particularities and lacking the appropriate scale to address regional problems effectively (Bantuş-Gurduza). Within this framework, several types of regionalization can be identified: *political regionalization*, as in Spain and Italy; *incorporated regionalization*, resulting from the creation of a unitary state through the union of multiple components that retain a degree of individuality (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); *diversified regionalization*, where regional structures are shaped not only by territorial and political criteria but also by language and culture (Belgium); *classical administrative regionalization*, through decentralization, whereby regions are established as administratively autonomous territorial entities (France); *functional regionalization*, through deconcentration, where regions function merely as administrative districts of the state (Greece); *regionalization through cooperation*, where regions take the form of institutionalized cooperation frameworks between local territorial communities (Romania).

2. THE NEW REGIONALISM

The evolution of international relations after the end of the Cold War reveals an intensification of regionalization processes. These processes, now referred to as “new regionalism”, developed rapidly across the globe and were already visible in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Nikitina). They first emerged in Northern Europe, a region divided during the Cold War by the Iron Curtain. Although the beginnings of regional cooperation can be traced back to the 1970s, most notably with the signing of the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea, an intensive regionalization process took shape in the late 1980s. The collapse of the Soviet Union was the most significant factor driving this development. Following the end of the Cold

War, interactions between Western and Eastern Europe expanded rapidly. At the intergovernmental level, this led to the creation of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in 1992. However, the new regionalism in Northern Europe was most clearly reflected in the active development of cooperation among non-governmental actors at all levels. Relations among regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, educational and cultural institutions, and business associations grew deeper and more extensive. As a result, hundreds of international organizations with diverse orientations emerged in the region (Lutaş, 2005).

The specific features of regionalization processes observed after the Cold War provide grounds for referring to a new regionalism. In order to distinguish between “old” regionalism and the “new” regionalism that took shape in the 1990s, it is necessary to clarify the differences between these two phenomena (Wheeler). New regionalism is not confined to formal interstate regional organizations and institutions; rather, it is characterized by multidirectionality, complexity, flexibility, and a departure from traditionalism. Moreover, it involves the participation of multiple actors, both state and non-state, who often interact in informal ways (Wang).

Thus, Björn Hettne develops the theory of new regionalism, drawing a clear distinction between the “old” and the “new” forms. He observes that “old regionalism” was essentially a Cold War phenomenon, limited in scope and objectives. By contrast, “new regionalism”, according to Hettne’s theses, represents a more comprehensive and multidimensional social process. It emerged within a multipolar world order and in the broader context of globalization (Urbano, 2024). becoming part of a global structural transformation. Within this transformation, numerous non-state actors began cooperating across multiple levels of the global system. In this sense, new regionalism arose both as a response to globalization and as a reaction to various dimensions of global processes (Lutaş).

A central premise of the new regionalism approach is the assertion that regions are inherently “artificial,” understood as constructed and reconstructed within the ongoing process of global transformation. Hence, a region is not a static entity but a dynamic and evolving form, open to change. Within this framework, regionalism is conceived as a multifaceted form of integration encompassing economic, cultural, political, and social dimensions. Its strategic objective lies in the creation of a region oriented toward strengthening unity and regional identity. The actors involved in regionalization processes include states, non-state actors, and social groups.

Regionalism is thus understood as both a policy and a project through which state and non-state actors collaborate and coordinate strategies of action within a given region, operating at supranational as well as interstate levels. Regional activities, whether sub-state or supranational, can significantly influence state-level dynamics.

In the context of new regionalism, there is a marked tendency toward the emergence of new forms of “multi-level” or “hybrid” governance. Fredrik Söderbaum, another prominent representative of this theoretical perspective, proposes a multi-level framework encompassing the national level, as well as macro- and micro-regional levels. Macro-regions (sometimes referred to as “world” or “international” regions) consist of large territorial units or subsystems positioned between the global order and the nation-state. Micro-regions, by contrast, comprise subnational territories, meaning parts of a country. Historically, micro-regions were understood as subnational units confined within the territorial boundaries of a specific state. New regionalism thus entails the evolution of a self-determined community of interests, which allows for an open debate

on a wide range of regional issues. This approach diverges from traditional security-centered and statist analyses, which emphasize national sovereignty and regional hegemony. Seeking to overcome state-centrism by focusing on regional organizations, the theory of new regionalism highlights the process of regionalization, describing it in terms of degrees of “regionality”. Regionality is understood as “a process through which a geographic area is transformed from a passive object into an active subject capable of articulating the transnational interests of an emerging region.” Hence, regionality implies that a region may exist to a greater or lesser extent, with its level rising or declining over time. Typically, when we refer to regions, we speak of entities in the process of formation.

There are no “natural” or “given” regions; rather, they are created and recreated within global transformation processes. Five stages can be identified in this process of regional formation: the regional space, the regional complex, the regional society, the regional community, and ultimately the region-state.

Regional space - refers to the existence of a region understood primarily as a geographically defined territory, delimited by more or less natural physical barriers and characterized by specific environmental features. Examples include Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, North America, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Regional complex —denotes the intensification of social contacts and interactions among previously more isolated groups, leading to the creation of a social system. This facilitates the development of “regionality”, albeit at a relatively low level. An illustrative case is the emergence of the Catholic Christian world between 800 and 1200, which contributed to the birth of a European identity. This stage is considered the beginning of the regionalization process. The subsequent creation of states consolidated national territories, and during certain periods (e.g., the Westphalian era in Europe), this led to a greater inward orientation, resulting in a temporary decline in the level of regionality.

Regional society – at this stage, the process of regionalization develops and intensifies across different levels, involving a wide range of actors beyond the state. Communication and interaction expand across multiple domains—economic, political, cultural—giving regionalization a multidimensional character. This expansion can occur through both formalized regional cooperation and spontaneous processes. In the first case, the region is defined by the membership of the relevant regional organization. This level of regionality can be described as a regional form of the international society of cooperating states, but not limited to interstate relations alone. Growing interdependence and an externally oriented perception of this stage of regionality generate complex interactions among diverse actors. These include a broad spectrum of transnational non-state actors: markets, private businesses, multinational corporations, NGOs, social movements, and other types of social networks based on professional, ideological, ethnic, or religious ties. Together, they contribute to the emergence of a transnational regional economy or a regional civil society.

Regional community - the fourth level of regionality refers to a stage in which a region becomes an active subject, possessing a clear identity, institutionalized or informal functions, legitimacy, and decision-making structures in relation to regional civil society that transcend the traditional boundaries of the state. This implies the convergence of ideas, organizations, and processes within a specific region. A regional community is characterized by the mutually reinforcing relationship between a “formal” region-defined as a community of states-and a “real” region, in which a transnationalized regional civil

society also plays a central role. Such civil society may emerge spontaneously from below but depends on both formal and informal institutions and regimes that contribute to security, prosperity, social communication, and the convergence of values, norms, and identities within the region.

Region-state - the fifth level of regionality involves processes shaping both the “formal” and “real” region in similar ways. The ultimate outcome may be the creation of a region-state, which, in terms of territorial scope and cultural heterogeneity, may be compared to classical empires. A region-state must be clearly distinguished from the nation-state, as it will never achieve the degree of homogeneity and sovereignty typical of a Westphalian-type state. From a political order perspective, the region-state represents the voluntary evolution of previously independent national communities into a new political entity, in which sovereignty is reduced for the sake of the common good and where democratic principles are more deeply entrenched. While national interests may remain dominant, they do not necessarily coincide with the interests of individual states. Moreover, power and decision-making are not centralized but rather stratified and decentralized across local, micro-regional, national, and macro-regional/supranational levels. This idea is embodied in the European Union, as articulated in the Maastricht Treaty.

For a clearer understanding of the process of regional construction in Europe, a distinction can be drawn between “old” and “new” regions. The term “old regions” refers to those that have emerged over time and gradually become integral parts of governance systems. Such regions often carry particular significance for their inhabitants and, consequently, serve as important sources of regional identity. Historically developed regions of this kind are generally found at the subnational level. In Europe, they can be identified in most countries (e.g., the numerous Swiss cantons, Italian provinces, etc.). By contrast, “new regions” are typically established as ad hoc projects aimed at fostering development and enhancing the competitiveness of the spatial unit concerned. In the case of cross-border regions, a key motivation is often the reduction of the role of national frontiers.

The most significant factor driving regionalization has been the enlargement of the European Union. In 1995, Finland, Sweden, and Austria joined the Union, while 2004 marked the EU’s largest enlargement, with the simultaneous accession of ten states: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Malta, and Cyprus. This new wave of enlargement also signaled the consolidation of Europe’s reunification after the Cold War. As a result, the significance of the European Union as a region within the Eurasian continent has grown steadily. One manifestation of the EU interest in regionalization processes in Northern Europe was the launch of the Northern Dimension program (Lutaş). Initiated in 1999, this program was established as a cooperative partnership between the EU, Russia, Norway, and Iceland, with the primary objective of fostering development in the northern region, including in areas such as transport, environment, health, and culture. However, following Russia’s aggression against Ukraine in 2022, the EU, Norway, and Iceland suspended cooperation with Russia and Belarus, which disrupted most projects under this framework. Although the program has not been formally dissolved, there are currently no interactions or new initiatives involving Russia, which had been one of its principal actors. The Environmental, Transport and Logistics, Cultural, and Health Partnerships continue to operate, albeit without the participation of Russia and Belarus. The remaining activities focus on cooperation among the EU, Norway, Iceland, and other stakeholders in the northern region (*Northern Dimension Policy*).

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of new regionalism represents a dynamic and complex response to the contemporary challenges of globalization and the geopolitical shifts of recent decades. Unlike the classical model of regional integration, characterized by rigid and institutionalized structures, new regionalism promotes flexibility, multidimensional cooperation, and the active participation of a broad spectrum of actors, including states, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector. This less centralized and more diversified approach reflects the realities of an ever-changing world, in which regions are no longer merely economic units but also geopolitical and social actors with their own identities and agendas. New regionalism combines the pursuit of economic development with the imperatives of security, environmental protection, and the strengthening of human rights, underlining the crucial role of regions in addressing global challenges.

Thus, new regionalism is not simply a continuation of regional integration processes, but rather a transformation of them, in which regions reassert themselves as key entities within the current international order. Regional approaches can provide solutions better adapted to the specificities of each region and contribute to a more balanced and inclusive form of global governance. Consequently, understanding new regionalism is essential for analyzing the geopolitical and economic developments of the twenty-first century and for anticipating future forms of cooperation and global integration.

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