

# Global Regionalization as a Phenomenon of Globalization

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*The article analyzes global regionalization as a developmental phenomenon in the global world. The author investigates this notion within the framework of Political Globalistics and interprets the global world in terms of a three-layer structure. Global regionalization is closely associated with the necessity for the subjects of the global relations to position themselves in the hierarchy of the emerging global world. Global regionalization with its peculiar features and complex character is an objective process: on the one hand, it constitutes globalization, and on the other hand, appears one of its consequences. In other words, global regionalization represents a new pattern of structuring the world society.*

**Keywords:** *global regionalization, global regionalism, macroregion, structure of the global world, hierarchy of the global world.*

Recently, the terms ‘global regionalism’ and ‘global regionalization’ are frequently used in the scientific discourse to evaluate the general level of regionalization of international relations. However, since these phenomena have emerged in the course globalization one should consider them exactly within this context.

As Zurab Marshania describes this current trend, ‘[g]lobalization... nowadays is characterized by the establishment of regional alliances between the states with similar interests. This enables them to work together and efficiently achieve their goals’ (Marshania 2011).

We interpret ‘global regionalization’ as a regionalization (fragmentation, segmentation) of a hypothetically integrated global world, that is the formation of regions on both sub-level (within states) and macro level (planetary) of the global political structure. The macro-level processes shape the international relations ‘where the main interaction occurs between different regional groups, rather than between major individual powers or coalitions of states that are geographically distant from each other’ (Troitsky 2009: 36–37). These processes change the whole system of international relations defined by the Westphalian Treaty, as well as reconstruct the global political order in geopolitical, geo-strategic and geo-economic terms and form new global *economic* and *political* centers.

In this context, a region obviously becomes a fundamental and cornerstone notion for the theoretical and methodological analysis of global regionalization. However, there is no universally accepted definition of a region in modern science since the interpretation depends on the employed method of analysis, that is on the peculiar approach to the analysis of regional phenomena and the sphere of regional life the scholar focuses on.

The *Political Encyclopedia* defines the region as ‘a unit independent in spatial and geographic, administrative and territorial, institutional and political, economic, social, histor-

ical and cultural, ethnic and demographic terms' (Political... 1999: 333–334). This definition is extremely 'extensive' since it can describe regions with greatly varying scale, for example, from the Vologda region of the Russian Federation to the USA, Western Europe and South-East Asia. On the one hand, a region can be interpreted as a territorial community within administrative boundaries as a constituent entity of a Federation. This interpretation of the region adopted in contemporary Russian academic discourse does not contradict the interpretation employed in Western science and practice, for example, in the 'Declaration on Regionalism' adopted by the European Parliament in 1988. On the other hand, 'a region' can be considered as a relatively non-uniform area characterized by a set of uniform features including political, economic, cultural, sociological, ecological, geographical, linguistic and other aspects as well as natural environment.

However, the *Global Studies Encyclopedia* gives the following definitions of a region: '1) an area defined by physiographic, administrative or any other boundaries; 2) a large territorial formation covering several countries, or a country's large administrative division differing from other territories in its characteristics, including natural and (or) historical, relatively stable economic, geographic and other aspects...' (Mazour, Chumakov 2003: 882).

Yuri Abramov and Vladimir Kuybar define region as 'a scientific category indicating a concrete historical integrity and possessing properties of resource ... technological and ethno-cultural self-sufficiency for expanded social reproduction' (Abramov, Kuybar 2008: 249).

According to this definition, as well as the one from the *Global Studies Encyclopedia* which are both methodologically 'wide' one can attribute to this category the regions of different scales from sub-regions to macro regions. Moreover, any state can be considered as a region. Meanwhile, in contemporary scientific discourse the term 'region' is used either to refer to a domestic administrative unit (sub-region within a state) or to describe a group of states (a macro-region).

A 'sub-region' as a social, territorial, economic, and political entity has been already thoroughly investigated (see Busygina 2009; Dergachyov, Vardomsky 2009; Turovsky 2009; Fundamentals... 2007; Barygin 2007; Kosov, Fokina 2009, *etc.*) while the nature and importance of regional macro-systems in the evolution of contemporary global political sphere is still not properly examined.

Macro-region, as a rule, has a number of uniform characteristics: common supranational authorities (the European Union, the CIS), sociocultural or linguistic boundaries (the Commonwealth Nations, the Atlantic community, the Arab world, the Eastern-Slavic area, *etc.*); confessional unity (the Islamic world, Christian Civilization); general socio-economic development model (Liberal, Continental, Mediterranean, Scandinavian, *etc.*).

Globalization is closely connected with regionalization of international relations and involves the transfer of some state functions either to an international or subnational level. Global regionalization has objective reasons; the main is the necessity for the actors of the global political arena to integrate into the emerging hierarchy. As we have already noted (Leonova 2013: 166–178), this hierarchy of political actors consists of the following tiers: 1) centers of power, 2) contenders for the status 'centers of power', 3) economic, political, military and civilization poles, and 4) regional powers. Each of them has its own characteristics defining their place in the hierarchy.

According to Mikhail Troitsky (2009: 46) 'World policy increasingly takes on the attributes of a competition between regional associations, each headed by a global or a large regional power or a center of power.'

On the one hand, global regionalization is an integral characteristic of globalization. But on the other hand, it is an opposite trend constituted by intensive processes of integration throughout the globe and resulting in the association of countries, establishing regional systems. Moreover, we observe the emergence of macroregions. In scientific literature they also often speak about 'fragmentation of the world', 'territorialization of the world', and 'coalition strategy' which reflect the emerging structuring of the world, which turns into a union of macro regions (poles, centres of power, and macro-regional systems). The leading macro regions (the EU, the Asian-Pacific Region, and the so-called 'Southern Cone' in Latin America) together with a global power (the USA) are the main driving forces of globalization; and to certain extent they draw other states into the orbit of their influence. It seems a macro-regional polycentric world and multilevel hierarchical structure is gradually replacing the Westphalian international order.

Macroregions comprises large local areas of the world and represent the third (macro) tier of the global political order. At the macro level, a region is considered to be a socio-economical and politically integrated unity which formally represents itself as a supranational and transnational actor. Thus, we can say that global regionalism is based on the concept of macro-region as an integrated socioeconomic and political system, which is integrated in geo-civilizational terms, is characterized by sociocultural proximity and recognized by a number of supranational political institutions. A peculiar feature of global regionalization is its complex character along with involvement in economic interstate cooperation or economic integration of adjunct countries. Global regionalization implies a whole range of processes and interactions in the political, diplomatic, social, cultural (*e.g.*, establishment of common educational system), ecological and information spheres. Consequently, for the purposes of our study of global regionalization we take into account the following aspects that define macro-regions: economy, geography, history, ethno-confessional structure, social, cultural, demographic, educational and other aspects.

Global regionalization and global regionalism are not completely identical terms. Global regionalization is regionalization of international relations at the global level. It is a process of fragmentation of the world, its virtual division into large self-sufficient economic and political segments, followed by the integration of such segments into the global hierarchy. However, global regionalism is the result of global regionalization and a system of relations between major interstate associations of the global world and its actors.

In theoretical and methodological terms the analysis of global regionalization is based on the perception of the macro-region as a structural unit of the global world or as a subsystem of the global political space.

Macro-region is a self-sufficient economic, political, military and strategic structural unit of the global world. On the one hand, a macro-region is a structural unit of the system of the global world since it is a social and natural integrity; on the other hand, a macro-region is one of the subsystems of the global political space. The macro-region as a structural unit of the global system has three specific features.

Firstly, macro-region, though being a self-sufficient system, is not a closed system. Its specific feature of openness is manifested in its ability to share resources, energy and information with the environment. Macro-regions actively exchange raw materials, goods,

human resources, funds, technologies, ideas, *etc.* with each other and with other actors of the global world. The communication and information exchange between a macro-region and its environment is particularly intensive.

Secondly, a macro region is a non-equilibrium, i.e. unstable, system, which constantly undergoes rapid or slow changes of its main characteristics, including structure, number of elements, their quality, functions, and configuration. The balance of a macro-regional system depends strongly on the environment. The global economic crisis with their particularly severe impact on the situation in the European Union has proved this once again.

Thirdly, macro regions are dynamic systems evolving with different dynamics. For example, macro regions can evolve from a free trade area, a Customs Union to a supranational formation with common corporate institutions. The scale of macro regions can also change. Thus, having been formed as regional groupings, in course of time they can acquire more global features which can be exemplified by the EU, NATO, the OSCE and the APEC as well as the SCO, the MERCOSUR, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the Southern African Customs Union, *etc.*

The integration processes in macro regions occur in a non-synchronic manner. Thus, the economic integration is frequently far ahead of political integration. Most macro-regional associations have been formed as a result of primarily economic integration: for example, the European Coal and Steel Community (which later evolved into the European Economic Community and eventually into the European Union), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), *etc.*

We can also speak about economic integration which has qualitative parameters that can be measured and evaluated. This type of integration is well studied and described both by the foreign and Russian scholars (Handerson 1999; Herst, Tompson 1999; Germain 2000; Molle 2001; Held *et al.* 2004; Etzioni 2004; Globalization... 2002; Global... 2001; Lavut 2004; Liventsev, Kharlamova 2001, Chumakov 2005; Shishkov 2001). Here we can also mention Vladislav Inozemtsev, Nikolay Kosolapov, Ernest Kochetov, Vladimir Lapkin, Marat Cheshkov, Alexander Chumakov, *etc.* The economic integration is generally viewed as a process of creating of a complex entity at the level of national economic systems. The political integration can be interpreted as a process of establishing of an integral complex at the level of the national political systems of independent countries. At present, the political integration has reached its limits which threaten countries' national sovereignty associated with integration, as well as with their desire to keep a certain political autonomy.

There is a certain scale of economic integration consisting of the following successive stages: a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, and an economic and monetary union.

It seems impossible to work out an appropriate scale to define the degree of political integration, particularly due to the lack of quantitative indicators. Although the experience of empirical observations for the most successful integration associations, i.e. for those who moved from economic to political integration (the EU) or are in the process of such transition, enables us to single out the following stages of their evolution:

- mutual information and coordination of internal and external policies of the member countries of an integrative association;
- coordination of general policy;

- creation of a regional security system;
- formation of supranational authorities (control, coordination, and later – administration);
- adoption of a common Constitution.

The global regionalization has the following characteristics:

1. A planned positive feedback to all participants of a regional association, possible economic and political benefits from participation in a macro-regional project.
2. This process is not natural; it is planned and organized and requires a lot of preparatory work, while its participants should perceive it as an objective necessity.
3. The created system is self-sufficient, unstable, and open.
4. Asynchronous economic and political integration.
5. The presence of a regional leader who initiates integration processes and is their main engine.
6. Historical and ethno-confessional communities are not very important, but their absence can slow integration processes (due to certain conditions). Their availability can improve the dynamics of ongoing integration.
7. Coincidence of economic models of development, political systems and a dominant value system increases the chances of a successful regional integration.

Global regionalization manifests itself in the following way. First, local communities integrate and merge into a macro region. This integration is based on both internal factors (economic partnership, similar political culture and institutions, social and cultural proximity, *e.g.* an identical civilization matrix) and external factors (common reference points of external policy, interaction strategies with the global world and its actors, issues of macro-regional security, *etc.*). Second, there occurs a localization of a self-sufficient territorial economic, political, and sociocultural community with defined boundaries often coinciding with the boundaries of an individual state. Third, on the basis of integration and localization there occurs a qualitatively new geopolitical and geo-economic entity whose members (sovereign states) transfer some of its functions. The boundaries of such macro regions may coincide with the boundaries of geo-civilizations (*e.g.*, the EU) and they have close trade and investment flows within the system which increases self-sufficiency, independence from the external environment, stability, and security.

The temporary asynchronous formation of macro regions is a distinguishing characteristic of global regionalism developing within the European Union, although with some contradictions. In other macro regions, like the Asian-Pacific, Eurasian or so-called 'Southern Cone' of Latin America, one can observe a quite obvious lag between integration, localization, and transfer of states' functions to a supranational level.

In general, the formation and development of the global political sphere is accompanied by differentiation, fragmentation, and emergence of macro-regions. It is also characterized by an instable development of the global world and its possible escalation into macro-regional conflicts within the main geopolitical axis (North-South, East-West).

On the other hand, the increasing macro-regional integration and localization creates the flexible and efficient mechanisms for such communities to adapt to globalization.

Global regionalization is an objective process, which should be regarded as an integral component of globalization. Globalization has led to a search for checks and balances, and attempts to create a geopolitical equilibrium via regionalization of international relations. The contemporary global world is not reduced to the real geographical space, but has become multidimensional. Global regionalization is a consequence of globalization and leads

to fragmentation of the world into macro regions as well as formation of a hierarchical global political system consisting of poles, centers of power, contenders for the status of a 'center of power' and regional systems of global world.

Thus, the analysis of the global world social and territorial spheres and of the global political map allows defining the phenomenon of global regionalization, which clearly shows an emerging new structure of the global political order.

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