

Research statement

Dissonant regionalism – the impact of border regime restriction on cooperation and integration

Some classical theories of (European) integration conceive integration as a top-down process: Merger of markets, economic cooperation and the emergence of regional and supranational institutions are understood as the result of top-down processes, of political decisions and overarching political concepts like federalism or the result of pressure from influential economic stakeholders like big corporations, well organized pressure groups and transnational enterprises. This approach fits well into the historic development of European Integration, seen as a concept (and policy) aiming at overcoming the threats of internal and external war (during the cold war) and creating wealth and growth through market integration.

However, it is doubtful, if this approach can explain the way to enlargement with Central and Eastern Europe – and it is also doubtful, if it fits with the development of regional integration in Africa. Some authors already see Africa as a challenge to established IR-theories. We would like to spread doubts if the development of integration in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 / 1991 (the fall of communist regimes in some countries and the subsequent dissolution of Comecon and Warsaw Pact) and the paths of integration in Africa can be explained in terms of top down approaches.

Prima facie evidence suggests, that as well in Africa as in Central and Eastern Europe, bottom up integration, triggered by asymmetric border regimes (and, as a result, smuggling, the development of a grey and black economy, informal cooperation and the establishment of legal and illegal trans border networks) were at the origin of integration. Institutional design and top-down approaches like institution building by state administrations, the enlargement of the Schengen system and the introduction of the EU's "acquis communautaire" often hampered and disturbed integration. We call this "dissonant regionalism" – the emergence of integration triggered by border regime disparities and the restraining and sometimes distorting effects of intergovernmental and supranational integration efforts on grass root developments transcending existing borders.

"Dissonant regionalism" is a project between researchers of IEP Bordeaux and ISM Wroclaw, which has been developed since 2006. At its current stage it aims at identifying, which level of Border Restrictions trigger integration and which levels hamper or even totally impede cooperation and integration and attempts to establish a model which allows to compare the impact of borders on cooperation and integration in Central and Eastern Europe and Africa.
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