
COMPARING THE INCOMPARABLE: CAN THE EUROPEAN UNION PROVIDE A MODEL FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION FOR THE MIDDLE EAST?

Muhammad Atif Khan
Loïc Moissonnier

Introduction

The dawn of the twenty first century has witnessed an intensification in regionalism across the world. Regional integration schemes have proliferated in the past few decades and the importance of regional groups in trade, politics, and the market has increased dramatically. The mushrooming of regional organizations is evident from the fact that the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) received only 21 notifications of Regional Trading Arrangements (RTAs) in the period 1948-1990, while it registered 564 RTAs from 1990 till June 2014, of which 21 were notified in the year 2013 alone.¹

However, without any risk of exaggeration, European regional integration is par excellence in this journey of regionalization. The European Union (EU) has consolidated its status as the prime regional integration arrangement over the past five decades. When drawing up a regional set up, usually the participating states concentrate on a single issue. In the case of the EU it was barrier-free internal trade. Institutional economics elaborates that “integration of goods and factor markets and of macro-economic and monetary policy making is most effective in strong institutional settings”.² So is the success of the EU an ‘affirmatory test’ to assess the aforementioned pre-requisites? On the other hand, in the course of its successful existence, it became evident that the EU could concentrate on other matters as well, which is why it proceeded further from market integration to policy integration. With the consolidation of European unity after the Treaty of Maastricht of 1992, the three-pillared European Union became a role model for successful regionalization across the globe.

¹ World Trade Organization, *Regional Trade Agreements*, Available from http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/region_e/region_e.htm, (retrieved on September 2, 2014).

² Willem Molle, *The Economics of European Integration: Theory, Practice, Policy* (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

It was the beginning of regional integration in West Europe which also prompted the Western academia to present different theories on regionalism. That is why the early theoretical work began just after the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. More work was done on the rationale behind regional integration after two more communities – the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) were set up in 1958. A major work in this regard was by the renowned German-American political scientist Ernst B. Haas, who published his book *The Uniting of Europe* in 1958³. Later Lindberg and some other political scientists enhanced the research in this field. These early theories are usually referred to as neo-functionalism. Even the critics of this theory, who later presented alternatives to neo-functionalism, used elements of the neo-functionalism logic to explain and analyze regionalism in the European context.

Though these diverse theories are helpful and significant for studying and designing regional integration around the globe, the question is still debatable whether these can be applied as model parameters to measure regionalization, regionalism and regional integration in other parts of the world. Researchers and social scientists working on comparative regionalism, basically had two conflicting views.

For one group, the contemporary mushrooming of regional organizations around the world, illustrates a significant new phenomenon of regional “integration”. After the apparent success of the European single market experience, different regional organizations in other continents, for example NAFTA, ASEAN and MERCOSUR restructured their integration schemes in order to follow the path of the European Union. They have started moving gradually or at least devising strategies aimed at establishing free trade zones, and then going beyond towards policy integration. So in short, for this school “the comparative political economy of regionalism deserves more intensive study, beginning with the assumption that Europe and other regions face similar challenges and opportunities”⁴.

³ Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).

⁴ A. Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

A prominent feature of the theory of neo-functionalism is the “spill over” factor. The logic of “spill-over” is that the process of integration is highly interdependent, and any integrative action in one sector creates the need for integration in a related sector, and so on. Scholars also applied this factor of regional integration to other parts of the world, contending that the success of regional integration in Europe has impressed those aspiring for integration elsewhere and that is evident because other integrative schemes are adopting almost the same procedures in their own structures⁵.

But many other researchers on the subject of comparative regionalism differ with this opinion. For them, the recent patterns in international regional integration, particularly in the developing countries, cannot be explained by these ‘Euro-centric’ theories. These apparent theoretical and applied differences may not only cause perplexity in the scholarly circles, it may also discourage policy makers in developing regions, to plan integration in a manner that would suit their native milieus.⁶

In any comparative study it is important to adopt the contribution of Haas as a principal argument, in this side of the debate. Haas suggested that to study the process of integration, one should be cognizant of the environment in which it is taking place. He listed, for example, three types of ‘background variables’ which must be kept in the mind.

1. The first variable is *social structure*. Europe has adopted pluralism, i.e. the existence of “articulate voluntary groups, led by bureaucratized but accessible elites”.
2. The second variable, according to Haas, is *economic and industrial development*. Europe has a high level of industrialization.
3. The last one is *ideological patterns*. In Europe there is a certain degree of cultural and societal homogeneity.

Concluding his explanation of the above-mentioned determinants for regional integration, Haas contends:

⁵ F. Laursen, *Comparative Regional Integration: Theoretical Perspectives* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003).

⁶ For a detailed discussion in this regard, see E. B. Haas, “International Integration: The European and the Universal Process”, *International Organization* 15, no.4 (1961): 366-392; and Joseph S. Nye, *Peace in Parts: Integration and Conflict in Regional Organization* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1971).

Integration proceeds most rapidly and drastically when it responds to socio-economic demands emanating from an industrial-urban environment, when it is an adaptation to cries for increasing welfare and security born by the growth of a new type of Society. On the other hand, countries dominated by a non-pluralistic social structure are poor candidates for participation in the integration process.⁷

So this school of thought has created a distinct set of criteria to study the efficiency of regional organizations in their respective milieus, with their specific characteristics, rather than generalizing them or applying European Union standards to them to measure their respective successes or failures.

The main purpose of this paper is not to favour or oppose any one of the above-mentioned perspectives. Rather this study purports to analyze both views and then to explain its own perspective on this debatable issue. For making our analysis clearer, this article is divided into three parts. After this brief introduction, we present a more comprehensive picture of regionalization in Europe. In this section, major emphasis is placed on the genesis and dynamics of European integration. How it began, what was the rationale behind the scheme, what were its successes and failures in the initial stages; and the main characteristics of regional integration in Europe, from the later half of the twentieth century until recent times. The second part will focus on the possibility of a similar scheme in another region of the world, that is the Middle East, where any moves towards regional integration are still not visible, though there have been various attempts to establish regional cooperation. This section will discuss the basic characteristics of regional integration, or better to say regional cooperation in the Middle East. What were/are the different regionalist schemes in the Middle East; how were they established and how have they performed; what are the dynamics of regionalism in the Middle East, and most importantly what are the major obstacles in setting up efficient regionalism in the area. The core of our discussion, however, is presented in the final part of the study, where we try to sum up the issue by evaluating whether we can compare regionalism in Europe to other regions of the world, in particular the Middle East, or is this comparison unfair and implausible. The

⁷ E. B. Haas, *Ibid.*

final part of the paper discusses the merits and demerits of such a comparison. For this purpose, it differentiates between the features which are valid for comparison, and others which simply cannot be compared. And then the final part explains our own stand in this debate – that this comparison is neither totally valid nor invalid, rather there is a fine line of demarcation between the comparable features and those that are not comparable in regional integration in Europe and other parts of the world.

European integration: A journey from economic to policy cooperation

To define the criteria of comparison between the dynamics of European integration and regional integration in the Middle East, it is first necessary to broadly trace the various steps of the European construction and to identify the motivations behind it.

The call for establishing the pioneering European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), contained in the Declaration of the then French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, on May 9, 1950, is regarded as the birth of European integration. Prepared by Jean Monnet, then head of the French Planning Commission, the Declaration proposed the pooling of the coal and steel resources and production of those West European countries which were willing to participate in the project.⁸ The French government which initiated this project had several motivations. First, the Schuman Declaration highlighted the need to prevent any more wars among European states; it expressed the desire to modernize this industrial sector, and to improve working conditions and living standards of workers. However, though not spelt out very openly the strategic dimension of this scheme, was to contain and control the economically revived West Germany.⁹

In the spirit of Monnet and Schuman's proposal, ECSC was the first step towards a political union of European states: “ *L'Europe ne se fera pas d'un coup, ni dans une construction d'ensemble : elle se fera par des réalisations concrètes créant d'abord une solidarité de fait*” “(Europe will not be made

⁸ *Commissioner General au Plan* (CGP), or Planning Commission, was created in 1946, to devise policy for economic and industrial development of France. Jean Monnet, its first head, implemented his famous “The Monnet Plan” through this commission in 1946-1950.

⁹ See, Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *Histoire de la Construction Européenne de 1945 à nos Jours*, 4th édition (Paris, 2004); and Martin Dedman, *The Origins and Development of the European Union 1945-2008* (London: Routledge, 2010).

all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity)" (Declaration of Robert Schuman, May 9, 1950). This famous quote illustrates the functionalist vision which drove this first European integration project. The pooling of coal and steel resources, actually opened the way to the eventual formation of a political community of all participating European states. This project was based on the concept that with the creation of the first "factual solidarity", the need would automatically arise for integration in sectors related to coal and steel. Later this idea was theorized by Ernst B. Haas who called it "functional spillover".¹⁰ No doubt the founding fathers were hopeful that this move would pave the way for creating real solidarity in a given economic sector, which would, at a later stage lead to the creation of a European federation, or a politically unified structure of Western Europe. In this regard, Monnet and Schuman were convinced that the political union of European states, must first pass through economic unification which would create favourable conditions for political union.

This idea of the subordination of political integration by economic integration seems to be confirmed when we look at the failure of the proposed European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954. Proposed by France on the outbreak of the Korean War, which had exacerbated the Soviet threat to Western Europe, the proposal included the creation of an integrated multinational army. Considering it as a threat to state sovereignty, the idea of defence integration was not received as enthusiastically by West European states, as integration in the coal and steel sectors.¹¹ Although the EDC treaty was signed in May 1952, the project was rejected in August 1954 by the French National Assembly. Conceived in the context of the Cold War, the EDC project was rejected by France because it did not want its military forces to be part of an integrated European army. The French government, it is said, felt that EDC did not offer sufficient guarantees to France against the threat of a resurgence of German militarism.

This failure of political integration reinforced the idea of integrating in the economic sectors. With rapid post-war economic recovery and the success of the ECSC, the ground was prepared for the signing of the Treaties of Rome in March 1957 for establishing the European Economic Community

¹⁰ Ernst B. Haas, "International Integration".

¹¹ Bitsch, *Histoire de la Construction Européenne*, 86.

(EEC) and EURATOM. This idea was proposed by Jean Monnet in 1954 and supported by the Benelux governments. In proposing the removal of restrictions on trade within the community, the objective again was to support the rapid economic development of all participating states. The common market was created by the institutionalization of common policies to regulate the functioning of the market; an example was regulating competition in the common market in the agricultural sector.¹²

The consolidation in initial years of European regional integration, highlights the origins of the European Union, which is primarily focused on the economic realm. Interestingly, while analyzing the beginnings of the European integration process, we find that the classical theories of European regionalism do not challenge this interpretation. The neo-functionalists (Haas and Lindberg) and the inter-governmentalists (Hoffman and Milward) strongly oppose each other on the true determinants of integration: while for the neo-functionalists, the process is part of a focused project supported by the administrative elites and transnational economic factors, managed by a functional mechanism; for the inter-governmentalists, it is primarily the nation states which decide whether to continue or stop the process, depending on their respective national interests and preferences. Nevertheless, these two major interpretations recognize that the economic realm initially provides the most viable ground for promoting cooperation among the member states in any regional organization. Initially, integration is thus more likely to occur in the spheres of trade, or common regulations for production in limited areas. Driven by sectoral transnational elites, or by rational calculation on part of the participating states in accordance with their interests, primarily economic, the success of European integration since the 1950s is therefore, owing to dynamic cooperation, focusing initially on economic and trade issues.

The recent history of the European Union also does not seem to contradict this interpretation. After a hiatus of some years, owing to de Gaulle's vision of Europe, and the strong desire not to undermine the sovereignty of nation states, the revival of European integration in the 1980s was primarily focused on achieving the goal of a single internal market, which led to the signing of the Single European Act (1986). At the same time, the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) initiated intergovernmental cooperation on

¹² Molle, *The Economics of European Integration*.

foreign and security policy and justice and home affairs. This movement toward political integration in the areas that impinge upon state sovereignty, may be interpreted as a form of spillover, from economic to political integration, yet it should be noted that in these political areas, states still retain their authority, as decisions are to be taken jointly and unanimously. Furthermore, the pursuit of economic integration for over 50 years has resulted in a blurring of distinction between the economic and political fields. In this regard, European Monetary Union and the introduction of a single currency has contributed significantly, as currency is historically considered one of the foremost symbols of state sovereignty. More recently, the management of the debt crisis and the austerity measures, that were meant to rehabilitate some member states like Greece, Portugal and Ireland in the economic arena, reflect this blurring: economic and monetary integration, in times of crisis, impinges on the autonomy of member states in managing redistributive policies at the national level.

Though recent developments in European integration seem to have highlighted this confusion about the distinction between economic and political integration, the fact remains that historically, European integration was founded on market integration, and then gradually it moved towards political and policy integration: as a result Europe has become the most integrated region in the world. It would be pertinent to ask whether the trajectory of this integration scheme is useful for understanding the regional dynamics of the Middle East.

The success and failure of regionalization in the Middle East

The Middle East, rich in oil and troubled by conflicts, is largely ignored in the comparative study of regionalization. There are two obvious reasons for this neglect. Firstly, it is the paucity of necessary data in the fields of socio-economic development from a majority of the states in the Middle East. There were serious obstacles in obtaining primary sources which are needed for quality research. Secondly, the comparative studies of regionalization began with the commencement of regional integration in Europe. This means that on the one hand the great success of European integration can be compared to some extent with the quasi-successful integration in North America or South-East Asia; on the other hand, however, there is the very marginal success and greater failure in the history of cooperation among the Middle Eastern states. This makes the

Middle East not a very good subject for the study of comparative regionalism. However, despite the two above-mentioned problems, in this part of the paper the prospects for regional cooperation in the Middle East will be analyzed.

Readers might have gathered that there was hardly any regionalism in the Middle East. However, the fact is that this region was a pioneer in regionalist politics. On October 7, 1944, five Arab countries signed the Alexandria Protocol in Egypt to form the League of Arab States. Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan took the initial steps to organize themselves into a political union and establish a clear position on the question of Palestine, particularly resistance against Zionist domination.

Nevertheless, a closer look into the articles of the protocol which set up the Arab League, clearly highlights the fact that this regional arrangement was primarily established on political grounds. The main purpose of the organization, described in the protocol, is as follows;

The object of the League will be to control the execution of the agreements which the above states will conclude; to hold periodic meetings which strengthen the relations between those states; to coordinate their political plans so as to insure their cooperation; and protect their independence and sovereignty against every aggression by suitable means; and to supervise in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries.¹³

The League of Arab States, commonly known as the Arab League, was formally created on March 22, 1945 some months before the establishment of the United Nations. The Arab League thus has the distinction of being the oldest functional regional organization of the contemporary world.

The general mandate of the League, as outlined by its charter was threefold: To strengthen relationship among member states; to coordinate further cooperation among them; and to maintain and respect each other's sovereignty¹⁴. While the need for economic cooperation is cursorily

¹³ Visit the Alexandria Protocol e-text at www.enotes.com/topics/alexandria-protocol.

¹⁴ Charter of the Arab League, available from www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3ab18.html.

mentioned in the charter, it has been given tertiary importance. The major emphasis in the charter is on political collaboration and respect for different forms of government in member states (Article 8), peaceful settlement of disputes among member states (Article 5), and concerted Arab League policies at the time of aggression against any member states (Article 6). In the twenty articles of the charter, there is not a single article which clearly emphasizes the need for the Arab League to pursue policies for economic collaboration among member states. Only a single sentence is included in the sub clause (a) of Article 2 which asks for cooperation among member states in "Economic and financial matters, including trade, customs, currency, agriculture and industry".¹⁵

The fact is that the genesis of regionalization in the Middle East is completely different from that in other parts of the world. In other regions of the world, particularly in the Europe, North America, and East Asia, member states were forging different schemes of regional cooperation, aimed at some sort of integration, or cohesion. They expected member states to give up some of their sovereign powers. In the Middle East, however, the new Arab states were opting for regionalization in order to save the independence and sovereignty of states. Perhaps that is why they avoided any practical steps towards regional cohesion, or integration.¹⁶

This opposition to any real step towards concrete regional integration was owing to the political consciousness of the modern Arab world, based on the concept of *Umma Arabiyya Wahida Dhaat Risala Khalida* (One Arab nation with an immortal mission), known in Western academia as Pan-Arabism. Public opinion in the majority of these Arab Middle Eastern countries gave this idea overwhelming support. The underlying factor behind this ideology was similarity in the realms of culture, politics, religion, and ethnicity in this region. Renowned Arab scholars, Fuad Ajami and Walid Khalidi, observed that this common Arab notion postulates "the existence of a single Arab Nation behind the façade of a multiplicity of sovereign states" and from this point of view, the individual Arab states in the Middle

¹⁵ Article 2(a), *Ibid.*

¹⁶ An interesting discussion, in this regard, can be seen in Michael Barnett and Etel Solingen, "Designed to Fail or Failure of Design? The Origins and Legacy of the Arab League", in Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston, *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180-220.

East were considered as “deviant and transient entities; their frontiers illusory; their rulers interim caretakers or obstacles to be removed”¹⁷.

Unfortunately, the recent wave of regime change in different Arab countries, a phenomenon commonly called “the Arab Spring”, did not alter the status quo with regard to regional cooperation and integration. Though there was some early optimism among some authors and Middle Eastern experts regarding the Arab Spring as a harbinger of change in regional cooperation, all expectations soon evaporated owing to the outbreak of conflicts in Middle Eastern states¹⁸. There were other analysts and experts on the Middle East, who from the beginning were not so optimistic about a resurgence of regional cooperation in the wake of the Arab Spring.¹⁹

With the creation of the Arab League and the other organizations that followed, the kings, emirs and dictators of the Arab states, however, found themselves in a dilemma. While struggling hard to save their monarchies, or dictatorships, they had to satisfy their own people who were calling for the sacrifice of this ‘artificial statehood’ in order to create a unified Arab nation. So that is why they created regional schemes to calm down public opinion. At the same time, they were not ready to make these organizations truly effective by delegating some sovereign powers and responsibilities to them.

The champion of the pan-Arabist ideology was indeed Gamal Abdul Nasser, the second President of Egypt from 1956 till his death in 1970. Under his charismatic leadership, Egypt became the leader of pan-Arabism. In the earlier years of his presidency, he called for Arab unity rather than Arab

¹⁷ F. Ajami, “The End of Pan-Arabism”, *Foreign Affairs* (1979): 355-373; and Walid Khalidi, “Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State”, *Foreign Affairs* (1978).

¹⁸ For examples where Middle Eastern analysts anticipate a positive effect of the Arab Spring on regional cooperation and performance of regional organizations, see, K. Kirişci, *The Arab Spring and Regional Integration: Can the EU and Turkey Cooperate?* (Washington D.C.: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2012); B. Law, “How the Arab League Embraced Revolution”, *BBC News*, 2 December 2011; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15948031>; S. M. Patrick, “The Future of Middle East Regionalism: Can an Institutional Desert Bloom?” Retrieved on 13 October 2014, from Council on Foreign Relations at <http://blogs.cfr.org/patrick/2012/11/12/thefuture-of-middle-east-regionalism-can-an-institutional-desert-bloom/>.

¹⁹ For example see, Jean-Pierre Filiu, *La Révolution Arabe: Dix Leçons sur le Soulèvement Démocratique* (Paris: Fayard, 2011); Mehran Kamrava, “The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution”, *Orbis* 56, no.1 (2012): 96-104.

integration²⁰. After the humiliating defeat of Arab countries by Israel in 1967, the charisma of Nasser lost appeal, though the late Egyptian leader is still remembered with love and respect by the Arab people. Fuoad Ajami regarded the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 as signalling 'the end of pan Arabism'²¹. Here regionalism in the Middle East came to a turning point. King Faisal and his Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was the new leader in the region. King Faisal, however, introduced regionalism based on another ideology, that is, pan-Islamism. A major breakthrough in this new wave of regionalism in the Middle East, with the reintroduction of the pan-Islamist ideology, came in 1969, when King Faisal convened a meeting of leaders of the Muslim countries in Rabat, Morocco, where they decided to establish the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).²² The establishment of the organization was agreed in principle at this conference where 25 Muslim states became its founder members. Out of these 25 founding members, 15 were Arab states, nearly all members of the Arab League, while 10 were non-Arab Muslim states, notably Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Senegal. Since this organization was indeed a brain child of King Faisal, the OIC headquarter was established in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the inclusion of almost all Arab states, including Egypt, clearly indicated the transformation of the regionalist paradigm in the Middle East, which had now entered its second phase. Hence, the weak performance of the OIC seemed like a replay of the Arab League, for the new organization was transformed into a debating club rather than an efficient means to foster development in the larger region.

However, regionalism in the Middle East is not a complete failure. Rather it has developed a certain regional framework, which is comparatively effective. One important development in this regard was the move towards sub-regionalism. A major example of this trend was the establishment of The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, usually known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was established in 1981, by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, alongwith its five smaller Gulf Arab neighbours – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Initially, the

²⁰ W. L. Cleveland, & M. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2009).

²¹ F. Ajami, "The End of Pan-Arabism".

²² The Organization of the Islamic Conference, in a recent move to revamp the performance of the Organization, redrafted its charter and also changed its name as Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, in 2011.

Gulf Cooperation Council was formed as a bloc to enhance security against the perceived internal and external threat from Iran after the Islamic revolution in 1979. Yet the organization did not take any concrete steps towards turning into a security bloc. A major example of this weakness is the much delayed establishment of Rapid Deployment Force (RDF). Though officially the RDF, also called "the Peninsula Shield" was formed in 1984, it was never used, not even in 1991, when a member state of GCC, i.e. Kuwait, was attacked and invaded by Iraq. The only time when this shield was used was during the Arab Spring, when the GCC sent this force to Bahrain, to crush the civil uprising against the Bahraini regime, in March 2011²³. This act of the GCC was widely regarded as a counter revolution against the Arab Spring.²⁴ However, notwithstanding its weak performance in the defence and security realm, the GCC has become a vehicle for mutual cooperation and coordination in other areas, such as the market and trade. As a result of this economic cooperation, the organization is perceived as a success story in regionalism. Its most important achievement is the complete elimination of intra-regional custom duties because of which intra-regional trade has increased manifold. Another major development is the agreement on setting up a common market and even a European-style common currency to be launched in the near future. So according to some authors, though economic cooperation and market integration in the GCC does not compare favourably with market integration in Europe and North America, "it does hold its own in comparison with other relatively successful Third World efforts".²⁵

In the light of the above we can safely draw the conclusion that most attempts at regionalism in the Middle East have not been very successful as they are based mostly on the ideological paradigms of pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism, rather than on pragmatic politico-economic considerations, or visions of trade as an instrument of peace-promotion. When the countries of the Middle East tried to make some sort of regionalist framework for economic and market integration, they got relatively positive results.

²³ E. Bronner, & M. Slackman, "Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest", *The New York Times*, 14 April 2011.

²⁴ M. Kamrava, "The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution".

²⁵ S. Cooper & B. Taylor, "Power and Regionalism: Explaining Regional Cooperation in the Persian Gulf", Dans F. Laursen, *Comparative Regional Integration: Theoretical Perspectives*, 105-124.

Table 1: A review of regional organizations working in the Middle East

Name of organization	Year of establishment	Number of member states	Functional domain	Performance estimate*
Arab League	1945	22	Political	Weak
OIC	1969	57	Political	Weak
OAPEC	1968	12	Economic, Technological	Satisfactory
GCC	1979	6	Economic, Defence and security	Satisfactory

*Derived from numerous studies on the performance of these IGOs.²⁶

Comparison between European and Middle Eastern regionalization

This brief analysis of the dynamics of regional integration in Europe and the Middle East, ultimately allows us to compare these two regions, thus returning to the debate we formulated in the introduction of this paper.

In general, the sequential analysis of these two schemes of regionalization allows us to draw an initial conclusion about the dynamics of integration that appear most likely to succeed. The areas include the adoption of common policies by participating states in the economic, social, and political realms. Whichever integration theory is applied (inter-governmentalist or neo-functional), the European experience has shown us that pragmatic cooperation, through integration in a specific domain (economy and market) has proved to be a more effective strategy for creating a regional setup. The experience of the Arab League, aimed at general political cooperation, without focusing on cooperation in the economic and other fields leads us to the same conclusion. The lack of any focussed economic cooperation seems to explain the weakness of the Arab League, though it remains a key actor in the Middle East. This comparative result becomes clearer in table 2 and table 3, where proportion and percentage of intra-regional and inter-regional trade in different parts of the world is given. A glimpse of these figures, clearly reveals that the European continent has performed excellently in the realm of intra-regional trade, particularly among EU member states, while the Middle

²⁶ A detailed discussion on the issue of performance can be seen in, Muhammad A. Khan, *Why the Context Matters in Middle Eastern and North African Cooperation: A Case Study in Comparative Regionalism*, Doctoral Manuscript (Grenoble: University de Grenoble, 2013).

East is far behind in this regard, needless to say presenting a rather dismal picture. Finally, the more recent experience of the Gulf Cooperation Council also seems to corroborate this interpretation; for by resolving to focus on the creation of a common tariff zone and free trade, the participating states today are envisaging the deepening of integration, to some extent, on the model of the European Union. In this respect, our brief analysis confirms the idea that it is easier to start with low profile economic projects and then to gradually move towards political cooperation in a regional organizational setup.

Table 2: Intra and inter-regional merchandise trade in 2011 (in US billion dollars)

Origin	North America	South and Central America	Europe	CIS	Africa	Middle East	Asia	World
World	2508	587	5844	399	453	561	4216	14851
North America	956	165	330	11	32	53	413	1965
South and Central America	138	148	108	8	15	15	134	577
Europe	416	98	3998	180	177	168	524	5632
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	33	6	308	109	9	19	88	588
Africa	85	14	184	2	62	19	123	508
Middle East	79	7	108	5	29	89	471	895
Asia	801	148	808	85	128	198	2464	4686

Source: WTO statistical database 2012

Table 3: Share of intra- and inter-regional trade flows in each region's total merchandise exports (percentage value in 2011)

Origin	North America	South and Central America	Europe	CIS	Africa	Middle East	Asia	World
World	16,9	4,0	39,4	2,7	3,0	3,8	28,4	100,0
North America	48,7	8,4	16,8	0,6	1,7	2,7	21,0	100,0
South and Central America	23,9	25,6	18,7	1,3	2,6	2,6	23,2	100,0
Europe	7,4	1,7	71,0	3,2	3,1	3,0	9,3	100,0
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	5,6	1,1	52,4	18,6	1,5	3,3	14,9	100,0
Africa	16,8	2,7	36,2	0,4	12,3	3,7	24,1	100,0
Middle East	8,8	0,8	12,1	0,5	3,2	10,0	52,6	100,0
Asia	17,1	3,2	17,2	1,8	2,7	4,2	52,6	100,0

Source: WTO statistical database 2012

In methodological terms, this affirmation through data, clearly follows the pattern of comparative treatment of regionalization in the Middle East and Europe. Thus, it is from this comparison of these two regions, that we subscribe to the idea that economic integration is the most effective way to set rolling the process of comprehensive economic, social, and political integration among states.

However, to say that European integration is applicable to other regional schemes owing to its universal character, is based on the assumption that the European model is appropriate for all times and all places, regardless of political, cultural, economic and societal features of regions beyond Europe. The fact is that the European model cannot be applicable because of the specific conditions of the European continent. For instance, there is a civil society convinced about the benefits of integration; a high level of economic development prevails; European society and culture is conducive to the development of regional institutions, such as the EU. All these features together have made integration a reality in Europe. The issue of comparability remains tied to the question of whether the European model is applicable, in its current form, or not, in other regions around the globe. In this regard, the entities in Europe and in other regions can only be

regarded as comparable, if they follow the same causal pathway, and if the same variables are present that produce similar effects.

Regarding the comparative perspective developed in this paper, the comparison does not prejudge the similarity or the divergence dynamics, it is actually meant to juxtapose them in order to highlight the differences and similarities. In this regard, comparing Europe and the Middle East allowed us to show that the existence of specific schemes, often limited to pragmatic economic issues, created the dynamics for further economic, social and political integration among the member states. However, the Middle East is not Europe, and the comparison between these two regions should enable us to understand why regionalism has not developed in a similar manner in these two regions.

Conclusion

For summing up our analysis, we can return briefly to the two regions that have been discussed. In general, the matters discussed in this paper lead us to look into the specific political, social and cultural environment of the regions, to explain the differences between them in terms of regionalization. First, the question arises if the level of economic development affects regionalization. In the 1950s, the strong economic growth in Europe was a major factor which motivated integration. It offered wider opportunities to large European companies, flourishing after the Second World War. On the other hand, a poorly diversified production sector, and an economy focused on oil in the Middle East, could explain the lack of interest in developing regional economic integration during the same period. More recently, the remarkable development of the Arabian Peninsula could explain the relative success of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Further, the existence of social and economic elite groups, directly interested in integration could also explain these differences in the perspective of neo-functionalism: a major driving force of integration are the non-governmental actors aware of the benefits of transnational integration and acting accordingly. Finally, such a comparison leads us to the conclusion that the cultural closeness of the population plays a role, albeit, a relatively limited one, in regional integration. Strong cultural cohesion characterizes Europe, where integration has been highly successful. On the other hand, regional integration is not vigorous in an even more culturally cohesive region, i.e. the Middle East. This aspect of integrative ventures deserves to be analyzed in depth.

Briefly put, comparing the European Union and other regional integration experiences in the world, including the Middle East, seems logical and relevant in order to better understand the phenomenon of regionalization. However, such comparison must be separated from the question whether the European model should, or could, be applied universally.