

AFRICA AND ASIA IN POST-COLD WAR SOUTH-SOUTH
REGIONAL ASSERTION

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Abstract

This article was written on the occasion of a seminar in Dakar on International Relations 50 years after Independence, co-organised by the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar with the participation of numerous colleagues from the St Louis Gaston Berger University and by Le Havre University, where I teach and carry out my work. I owe both intellectual and personal feelings of gratitude to all colleagues there as well as to all my colleagues in new partner countries, of which Romania is naturally one, in the wake of the end of the cold war. The end of the cold war is not just a historical point on a chronological scale; it is also a human experience, which I have intended and still do to live to the full.

Keywords: *delayed 'post-war' effect, regional assertion, political forgetfulness.*

JEL Classification: R11, R13, R19.

The topic of this article is 'South-South regional assertion'. It is, for the purpose of this article, illustrated with the hypothetical suggestion that both Africa and Asia have come a long way in this assertion. The timeframe of such an analysis needs to be specified but, naturally, what comes to mind are both the 50 years of independence in Africa and the 20 years elapsed since the end of the cold war in Asia. That being said, still on this particular illustration among many possible other illustrations drawn from the world regions at large, two further framework points need to be made clear.

The delayed 'post-war' effect. There seems to exist a constant trend in regional assertions. Dramatic and post-traumatic circumstances are conducive to major ruptures: post WW-II in Europe; post-independence in Latin-America; post cold war in Asia. In Africa, the coincidence of independence/cold war seems to have delayed such ruptures. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded in

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détente but the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) was launched after the cold war.

Concept and forms of regional assertion. The concept of regional assertion is fairly simple. Regional assertion means “getting organised as a region with a view to equalisation with other regions”, a levelling-off of sorts, with partnerships and exchanges but on an equal footing. However, the forms of regional assertion are many and complex : from a ‘conference’ or a ‘cooperation’ to a ‘union’, there lays the vast array of ‘customs unions’, ‘common markets’ and ‘single policies’ as well as the full range of political commitments.

The main argument here is that, given the history of colonisation and independence, African and Asian assertions are taking place in a context of forgetfulness (I) and have an impact on political reinventions (II)

I - The context of ‘South-South’ assertion : forgetting the North and the West

Post-conflict dynamics, whether post-colonial or post-war, create a context of open options. One natural option is for former dominators or dominated to distance themselves, sometimes obviously to the point of - it seems - forgetfulness, whether political forgetfulness (§ 1) or economic forgetfulness (§ 2)

§ 1. The political forgetfulness of Europe vis-à-vis Africa and Asia

‘Forgetfulness’ is to some extent too strong a word to qualify relations in an open and globalised world. However, certain attitudes of Europe in the post cold war have been surprising, to say the least and in, two cases, a hidden agenda was probably operating, perhaps more bluntly in the case of Africa but such an agenda was present also in the case of Asia.

As to Africa, the 1994 Lomé Agreement renegotiation had as an impact that they decoupled Africa from the Caribbean and the Pacific regions. This happened as if Europe was forgetting Africa for the benefit of

Asia-Pacific and was doing so only a few years hence, after the creation of APEC in 1989/1990. Furthermore, secondly, the unilateral devaluation of the CFA Franc struck a blow to West African economies of the France Zone without any apparent logic rooted in post-independence Europe-Africa relations. This was perhaps more a preparation for the European single currency than an attitude 'mindful' of African interests.

As to Asia, the 1996 ASEM or Asia-Europe Meeting or Process looked as if it echoed a strong European 'mind' in favour of Asia, or at least of Southeast Asia since ASEM brings together EU Members and ASEAN Members and the "+ 3" or associated countries. But on the face of it, in fact, ASEM corresponded to a *European* need: to have an outlet for the new European Union's foreign policy in the making. It corresponded also to an Asian need but more a need for Northeast Asia than for Southeast Asia. In other words, ASEM made sense less in terms of the founding ASEAN members than in terms of China, Korea and Japan, not even ASEAN Members but in 'ASEAN + 3'.

Why should Africa and Asia then 'remember' Europe if Europe takes the first and second opportunities to seek elsewhere the best way to serve her interests? Africa and Asia's interest is also to look somewhere else, not as a retaliation but out of realism and, partly, to each other.

§ 2. The economic forgetfulness of Africa and Asia vis-à-vis Europe

This political opportunism of Europe is somewhat outdated since the world is now an open trading bloc where all relations matter. It led, as European opportunisms, to a dedicated economic realism in Africa and in Asia. Notably, in the post cold war, where their foreign trade with other regions and the foreign direct investments from other regions have been redirected.

As to Africa, this redirection of trade and investment has operated towards Asia and Latin America even if, to some extent, Europe's partial 'withering' from Africa led also to a potent US influx of economic relations with Africa. Clearly, the post cold war inventions are South-South oriented.

In this vein, African foreign trade has massively boomed with Asia and Latin America, essentially, thereby 'redirecting through diversification' of relations. Here lies the innovation, even if some continuation lingers on in trade with the West/North: Africa is not in a simplistic, revengeful attitude with the Europe and the West but in an open-minded attitude, assessing economic partnerships less in terms of historical dynamics but in terms of competitiveness of candidates to trade with Africa.

As to Asia, the 'redirecting' of trade and investment has 'taken on' more a form of recentering. Asia's economic and trading partnership, logically, have 'exponentialised' with Africa, but Asia herself is a continent that belongs both to the prosperous North and to the emerging South. In this dynamic, industrial and prosperous Northeast Asia, including China from the 1990s has been able to 'recenter' toward Southeast Asian partners and also towards Central Asian new partners. The three countries of 'ASEAN + 3', that is China, Japan and Korea, massively invest in Central Asia, especially into Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where they are more than 'on par' with Europe and North America. This trend, however logical, is new and as such deserves a redirecting also of international research.

II - The impact of 'South-South' assertion: 'reinventing 'Afrasia''

Regional dynamics do not occur in vacuums but as a reaction to a context of particular intensity and they bear upon the realisation of innovations directly linked to the management of this context. Two such innovations are classic steps in regionalisation. One consists in turning neighbours, from foes, into partners (§ 1); another in institutionalising cooperation and making it irreversible or at least lasting and open-ended (§ 2).

§ 1. Regionalising neighbours

The post cold war everywhere in the world has brought about a redefining of concepts such as allies, neighbours and partners. To be sure, allies could be distant ones and no longer prevail today: neighbours as

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partner-neighbours have become the norm. This is clearly the case the European construction, turning European 'enemies and dangers' into 'integrative partners' but also the case of other regions (hence the need for comprehensive comparative analysis, which escapes the format of this article).

Africa is a case in point, where regional organisms are flowering. However, what would be a European 'model' is not in application as such in this continent. Africa 'knows better' than imitating Europe. Even if the terminology (the 1975 Economic *Community* of West African States, the 1994 West African Economic and Monetary *Union*) sounds European, West Africa has devised and implemented common sectoral programmes before integrating through institutions and community law on a European mode. Neighbours within African sub-regions have turned from geographical entities into political and economic trusts and confidence-building groupings, all over Africa, West, East and Southern, Central and Northern. The trend is certain and conferences such as the one where this paper was presented bear testimony to this fact: topics are integrations through common organisations.

Asia is another instance illustrating this very point regarding innovations. This is a continent where history has produced distrust long before colonisation and where, therefore, decolonisation, engulfed into the East-West division, just as in Africa, has not left nations and states free to choose their new course of action. So that Asian nations have either never learnt to trust each, especially in the case of china, Japan, Vietnam, etc., or never had Nation-States, comparable to the European 'model', as in Central Asia today, where States have to manage Nation-building, pluriethnically, first and foremost. However, Asia's inventiveness, has created dynamics conducive to such novel forms of management, notably the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) since 1996, in addition to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia-Pacific, a 'remake' of the Heklsinkin CSCE but transpacific and therefore may not be on the appropriate (territorial) scale.

Comparisons are always delicate (and 'die hard') and not relevant if they attempt to conclude on exact resemblances but ought to suggest

similarities which then have to be contextualised. Meaningful comparisons are between European *integration*, African and Latin American *common policies* and Asian *trust-building*. In twenty years, Africa and Asia have, from this point of view, progressed faster than the European ones.

§ 2. Communitarising, Unioning, Organising

Various forms of regionalising exist in the world which itself has become pluri-regional. What matters is less the realising of such or such a form than the capacity for partner-neighbours to progress from one form to the next. To be sure, for instance, APEC has not so progressed but remained an intergovernmental conference; NAFTA is still just a trade Agreement among economies. But Europe and West Africa have gone from Community to Union; and Asia has progressed from a dormant to an active ASEAN and from a Group dynamics to an Organisation of Cooperation (Shanghai).

As to Africa, it was uneasy for me, speaking at a conference in the presence of our colleague Alioune Sall, author of *Les Mutations de l'Intégration des Etats en Afrique de l'Ouest*,¹ to speak with authority of West African regional organisations. However, it seems to me that all necessary conditions are assembled for 'assertion' there, even if they cannot be adequate conditions. The regionalising laboratory is active, almost in full swing: the capacity to go from an *Organisation* of African Unity to an *African Union*, at the same time as the capacity to go from an *Economic Community* of West African States (ECOWAS) to a *West African Economic and Monetary Union* (WAEMU), while naturally Central, Eastern and Southern Africans also innovate with *Common Markets* and *Development Communities*, bear testimony to this fact. Critical appraisals sometimes point to the insufficient 'results', especially concrete results 'comparable' with European ones, of such initiatives. Realists will probably never agree with Idealists for what is idealistic phenomenology is not simply a mental attitude which puts the relevance of projects and ideas before the accounting of the deeds.

¹ L'Harmattan 2006.

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As to Asia, it is in a sense similarly uneasy for me here, albeit for different reasons, to speak with authority. Such a (relative) uneasiness is due to the fact that the most innovative Asia is also the most novel and therefore the least known: the Asia of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (China, Russia, Central Asia¹ + observers). Generally speaking, Asia is both inventing trust, as is recalled *supra*, and institutionalising trust. i) First, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN of 1967 has become an active 10-Member ASEAN, with enhancing developments such as 'ASEAN + 3', 'ASEAN + 6', the ASEAN Regional Forum or ARF, the East Asia Summit and, already since 1996, ASEM, some fifteen years ago today; ii) the Shanghai Group Asia of 1996 became in 2001, only six years later, a full 6-Member Organisation, with four potent observers (India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia), as well as full and pillars, common military manoeuvres sectoral environmental ambitions. Times have long since gone when Asia was either recovering from post-colonial adjustments, or fractured by the cold war or even uncertain as to the viability of her economic miracles. The last artificial blockage - division of Korea - should soon be lifted.

Common Secretariats, parliamentary assemblies, financial arrangements, as well as suggestions to merge institutions, for instance the two Secretariats of the Common Security Treaty Organisation and of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation into a common secretariat for instance, as was suggested in 2007, confirm this admittedly varying degree of institutionalisation, which is today a given fact to be integrated into any comparative analysis of comparative regionalisms.

In **conclusion** of such a rapid overview of the proposed emphasis on regional assertions in the dynamic of 'South Vs North' post cold war dynamics, the claim is not to have illuminated the subject, let alone thoroughly. However, a few points can be further made to sum it all up:

i) the 21st century shall be that of 'post-dependence' theory. Of course, neo-dependence, domination and inequality shall persist but the regional

¹ Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, but not Turkmenistan.

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thrive is one of equalisation;

ii) regions 'closing-in' will probably incur delays in their world assertion. Europe's 'criterionisation' contrasts here with African and Asian open-mindedness;

iii) institutionalisation, especially 'achieved'/'deepened' integration is not a prerequisite or even a measuring tool for region-building. The 'idea' of a region and a regional 'project' are more fundamental;

iv) last, the risk also exists of regions yielding antagonistic regionalisms, just as Nations launched nationalisms and wars.