



GR:EEEN Second Executive Briefing Conference

Summary Paper

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On Monday 20 May the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the international conference “New Regional Power: What Role for Europe?”. The event was conceived and arranged by ISPI within the FP7 “Global Reordering: Evolution through European Networks” (GR:EEEN). Members of the network are 16 universities and think tanks from all over the world, coordinated by the University of Warwick. With its four years' duration and its far-reaching international membership, GR:EEEN comes out on top among similar EU-funded research projects.

The event is the second in a series of Executive Briefing Conferences that ISPI organizes every year throughout the project's time span. The goal of these meetings is to discuss the results achieved by the partners in order to come up with further insights and policy recommendations to be presented to a group of stakeholders including policy makers, public officers, business and civil society actors. In doing so, ISPI ensures that the project's research activities have a concrete impact on how public and private actors respond to the multipolar trends in world politics.

Themes and questions

The theme of the conference – as displayed in the enclosed programme – was the regionalization of international relations with reference to the emerging ambitions of regional hegemony by an extremely diverse grouping of middle powers such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Qatar, Turkey, South Korea. As expected, the often questionable grounds of these countries' demands and their lack of apparent common features and interests offered a very stimulating opportunity to grapple with a series of crucial issues, surfaced during the discussion:

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- to what extent is power actually shifting along regional lines?
- what is the rationale of groupings like the BRICS or the “second wave” of regional powers?
- how will these regional tiers relate to each other and with the EU and the USA?
- what kind of policies will the EU have to adopt to best integrate the bilateral, multilateral and inter-regional dimensions of its external relations?
- how and to what extent can the EU still be a model of international – and regional – integration?

Answers and policy recommendations

From the open discussion that took place among the speakers and the stakeholders attending the conference, a number of analytical results and practical proposals emerged.

- At a closer look, the latest wave of aspiring regional powers shows a general lack of common views, political purposes and interests. That makes it much less likely for them to be able to fulfill their aspiration to regional hegemony and to provide each other mutual support against major powers and the international community.
- The same deficit of common purposes affects to some extent the much more institutionalized BRICS group, too. Although these countries are endowed with a substantial share of power capabilities, not all of them seem to be even pursuing regional leadership (see the cases of South Africa and, in some respects, Brazil), which was regarded as a basic prerequisite to belong to the grouping. The competing global agendas of the members - especially China's - undermine the internal consistency of the BRICS.
- Both the BRICS and the “new wave” countries seem to be kept together more by “being against” something than by any positive agenda. The need of external support in the competition against a regional rival, the (perceived) under-representation in regional fora, the persistent global dominance of the US are some of the most effective incentives to stick together. However, the actual capability to coordinate decreases dramatically among the emerging regional powers - so much so that it appears very unlikely that they will ever be able to match the BRICS level of institutionalization.
- The new class of aspiring regional powers is particularly sensitive to domestic contingencies - be it Nigeria's proneness to ethnic and religious conflicts, which tend to get worse at any electoral cycle; the unstable balance between Pakistan's political and military élites, which heavily influence the ever-tense relations with India; the lack of institutionalization of the Qatari political system, which makes its foreign policy highly dependent on the rulers' political opinions. That makes their foreign policy agendas erratic, and scarcely apt to adjust to other actors' priorities.
- The EU should keep a cautious attitude towards the regional aspiration of these middle-powers (and, to a lesser degree, of BRICS countries). In so much as these countries prove to be unable (or unwilling) to coordinate their agendas and remain prone to domestic issues, the EU and the member states had better focus on bilateral relations with them. A bilateral is advisable also because some of these countries (e.g. China) actually free-ride the current international order they complain against in order to pursue their interests, sometime at the expense of other aspiring regional powers.
- At the same time, though, the EU should not give up its aim of shaping, as much as possible, the forthcoming international order as an inter-regional one. This would not only be coherent with the distinctive attitude to international politics of the EU - which has always endeavored to conform its foreign policy to certain fundamental values and to a multilateral approach, acting as a *model* and not only

as a partner. The EU should keep trying to act as the promoter of a new world order also because, in doing so, it would be one of the few existing factors that are going to prevent power from fragmenting even more among international actors, particularly now that the US is gradually pulling back from its role of global hegemonic actor. "Suspending" its international role waiting for the economic crisis to end would therefore increase international instability - an even less affordable cost for the EU.

- The establishment of an inter-regional and/or multilateral order is a top priority in an increasingly multipolar era, and the EU has major responsibilities and opportunities in achieving it. In order to pursue this goal, the EU has to improve the means through which its foreign policy is implemented. An effective vertical integration between the new External Action Service and national diplomatic services is absolutely necessary to interface more effectively with international partners, but also to smooth the policy making process in the EU institutions, possibly resulting in a more coherent foreign policy.
- The much-needed reform of the institutional structure of the EU may have important implications on its external dimension. A "multi-tier" reconfiguration of the European Union may offer the opportunity to deal more effectively with issues of primary importance as the admission of Turkey or the relations with Russia. A more nuanced membership outside a "federal core" would allow focusing only on less controversial issues - such as energy or security - while institutionalizing the relations with the closer regional powers.
- In fostering deeper cooperation with remote regional powers - India, South Korea - the EU should tend carefully to its relations with the US. As important as the Eurasian connection is going to become, the EU has to be aware that in the foreseeable future the US will still remain the only genuine global actor. Reaffirming its allegiance to the transatlantic community, the EU will avoid to be regarded by the US as just another regional actor, and will be able to play a role in counterbalancing the rise of Asia-Pacific powers.