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## The English School and the Study of Sub-global International Societies

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YANNIS STIVACHTIS, MAY 8 2013

The purpose of this essay is to review the English School (ES) literature associated with the study of sub-global international societies. For classical ES scholars, regional international societies were only regarded as important because the contemporary global international society was seen as a consequence of the expansion of one particular sub-global (European) international society.[1] Nevertheless, concepts derived from the global perspective of the ES still have application at the regional level. For example, there is general agreement among ES scholars that the contemporary global international society is a “thin” one, in the sense that it is pluralistic and heterogeneous; and that within the bounds of that society, there are several “more thickly developed” “regional clusters” in which the solidarist elements of international society are developed to a greater degree.[2] According to Barry Buzan, because the logic of anarchy works more powerfully over shorter rather than longer distances and because states living in close proximity with one another may also share elements of common culture, *gemeinschaft*[3] types of international societies may exist within the confines of a global international society.[4] These, moreover, are places where a modern standard of “civilization” is at its most developed.[5] Moreover, Buzan argues that the uneven development of international society means that some parts of the contemporary global system have more developed regional international societies than others.[6]

### The English School and the Study of the European International Society

In the ES literature, the Western community of states serves as the most obvious candidate for a sub-global international society. However, it has been demonstrated that the West constitutes a set of overlapping regional international societies with different degrees of thinness/thickness.[7] Within this literature, “Europe” occupies a central place not only because the region conforms to the basic defining condition of regional inter-state society, but also because the possibility exists (although it will be unevenly realized) for a broadly integrative and solidarist movement toward cooperation and convergence.[8]

Roger Morgan has argued that some of the concepts used by the traditional ES scholars can help to illuminate the current functioning of the European Union (EU) seen as a body of states subject to a wide range of rules, both formal and informal.[9] Hartmut Behr also suggests that the idea and study of international society can be applied empirically to the EU as well as Europe as a whole.[10] Thomas Diez and Richard Whitman have employed the ES concepts of “international society”, “world society” and “empire” to reconfigure the debate about the nature of EU governance and to compare the EU to other regional international systems.[11]

Starting from Buzan’s premise that regional international organizations may reflect the existence of regional international societies, Yannis Stivachtis, Mark Webber and their colleagues have sought to demonstrate that NATO, the EU, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) point to the institutionalization of international society at the sub-global/European level.[12] Examining the EU, Thomas Diez, Ian Manners and Richard Whitman conduct a comparison between the EU as a regional international society and the global international society as analyzed by Hedley Bull. They argue that the five core institutions of international order identified by Bull (balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and great powers) have been modified or replaced. As a result, they identify the new institutions of the European order as the pooling of sovereignty, the *acquis*

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*communautaire*, multilevel multilateralism, pacific democracy, member state coalitions and multiperspectivity.[13]

Focusing on NATO, Webber contends that during the Cold War, NATO was part of the “thick” or solidarist end of European international society characterized by a convergence of values, and a sense of cooperative endeavor and common community. This core of “liberal solidarism” stood alongside a “thinner” pan-European international society, characterized by pluralist features of state co-existence, limited cooperation and the dominance of procedural mechanisms, such as the balance of power, diplomacy and international law, for managing international politics. According to Webber, NATO’s post-Cold War development, and particularly its experience of enlargement, has modified this picture in some respects. Enlargement has provided the basis for an extension of the “thick” core of European international society as new members have become enmeshed in the institutional, political and social practices associated with the Alliance and NATO. In parallel, however, these very same practices have lost some of their meaning as constitutive of NATO. He concludes that in seeking to consolidate both the thicker (solidarist) and thinner (pluralist) ends of European international society spectrum NATO has managed to succeed fully in neither enterprise.[14]

Yannis Stivachtis and Mike Habegger suggest that the CoE was and remains an essential component of European regional international society and that the evolving structures and functions of organization demonstrate an ongoing commitment to a homogeneous European regional international society.[15]

Examining the OSCE, Georgeta Pourchot argues that the organization has developed most of the elements necessary for an international society. Pourchot notes that the OSCE displays elements of both “solidarism” and “pluralism” and contributes to a thin-thick continuum of international society in a manner that is functionally and structurally relevant.[16] Similar conclusions have been reached by Stivachtis and Habegger in their own study of the organization.[17] Pourchot also demonstrates that some of the institutions of international society identified by Bull, such as the balance of power, international law and diplomacy are at work within the framework of the organization concerned.[18]

Another strand within the Europe-related ES literature focuses on the development of sub-European international societies. Laust Schouenborg analyzes the formation of a Scandinavian international society over a 200-year period and develops the concepts of “primary institution” and “binding forces” as an analytical framework.[19] A similar approach has been undertaken by Stivachtis who focuses on the formation and evolution of a Balkan international society that can be distinguished from the broader European international society in which it is embedded.[20]

## *European Regional International Society (ERIS) and Its “Others”*

One of the main research themes developed by the classical ES was the study of relations between the historical European international society and the states located on its periphery, such as Russia and Turkey. It is interesting, therefore, to see what kind of relations exists currently between the core of ERIS, on the one hand, and Russia and Turkey, on the other.

According to Richard Sakwa, although Russia has formally adopted Western democratic norms, their implementation is impeded by both practical and political forms of resistance to the universalism proclaimed by the West.[21] Russia does not reject the norms advanced by the main institutions of European international society, but it objects to what it sees as their instrumental application. As a neo-revisionist power, Russia insists on respect for territorial and governmental sovereignty. Consequently, Russia does not repudiate engagement with international society, but at present is ready only for a relatively “thin” version. Contrary to Sakwa’s view, Pami Aalto argues that the EU offers Russia access to regional level international society with a “thicker” set of institutions than are available in its relations with the United States and the Asian countries.[22] The fact that Russia identifies itself with Europe has driven it to experiment with some of the solidarist institutions typifying EU-centered societies, most notable the market. Therefore, the ambivalence one may observe in the current relations between the core of ERIS and Russia is not very different from the ambivalence of the historical relations between the core of the European society of states and Russia.

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While Turkey is regarded as an integral part of ERIS, yet it is not included in its core organization, namely the European Union. Bahar Rumelili suggests that the EU relations with Turkey continue to be situated at the intersection of Europe's particularist impulses and universalist ambitions and the construction of European and Turkish identities *vis-à-vis* each other is likely to remain an important arena of contestation.[23] Stivachtis has provided a comparison between the treatment of Turkey by the EU and the treatment that the Ottoman Empire received by the members of the historical European international society and identifies many similarities between the two processes.[24]

Finally, since the creation of the contemporary global international society has been the result of the European expansion and the superimposition of the European society of states upon other co-current regional international societies, Stivachtis and his colleagues have sought to examine the perceptions that people and states in various parts of the world hold about Europe and the European Union in order to find out whether these perceptions have anything to do with the historical expansion of Europe.[25] Their work has revealed that some of these perceptions can be partly attributed to the historical expansion of Europe.

## The Study of non-European Regional International Societies

Due to the uneven development of international society, which means that some parts of the contemporary global system have more developed regional international societies than others, another strand of ES scholarship focuses on the study of international society in other world regions to find out what factors contribute to their strength or weakness. For example, relating the study of regional international societies to the study of regional security in various world regions, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever have demonstrated how the presence or absence of mature regional international societies condition (in)security at the international, regional and state levels.[26]

Barry Buzan, Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez and their colleagues provide a comprehensive overview of the history of the Middle East and how its own traditions have mixed, often uncomfortably, with the political structures imposed by the expansion of Western international society. They argue that the Middle East forms a sub-global international society that can be distinguished from the broader international system. However, this society has not reached a maturity degree comparable to that of the European regional international society.[27]

Wang Qiubin focuses on the Northeastern Asia regional international society and argues that this did not come into being until the end of the Cold War, when the states recognized mutually sovereign equality. Qiubin argues that compared to the EU, regional international society is not mature in Northeast Asia and the core principles of the Westphalian system, such as territoriality and sovereignty still dominate the region.[28]

## The Expansion of Regional International Societies

The fact that *gemeinschaft* types of regional international societies may exist within the confines of a global *gesellschaft* type of international society raises the possibility that some of them may face the challenge of expanding into regions with their distinctive cultures. For example, it has been convincingly shown that the European Union (EU) constitutes a regional homogeneous international society embedded in a heterogeneous European international system.[29] Through the process of enlargement, however, the regional homogeneous European international society (EU) expands outward, gradually transforming the heterogeneous European international system, in which it is embedded, into a more homogeneous regional European international society.[30]

But how do expanding *gemeinschaft* societies incorporate members, which do not share their culture? Because the standard of "civilization" has fallen into disrepute, other standards have risen to take its place. Of particular importance is the standard of "democracy," which encompasses several other associated concepts such as respect for human rights, the rule of law, and liberal economic development. This, along with its portrayal as a timeless universal concept, provides democracy with an advantage in the expansion of regional international societies. As such, democratization has become a stand-in for the civilizing project. Drawing on the example of the EU, Stivachtis has argued that "membership conditionality" serves a role similar to that of the historical standard of "civilization." [31] Stivachtis has demonstrated the similarity between the contents of the Copenhagen criteria, whose purpose is to regulate the EU enlargement (expansion) process, and the contents of the standard of "civilization," and has argued

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that unless candidate states fulfill these criteria, they cannot be admitted into the EU.[32] Democracy promotion thus became a central dynamic of enlargement not only for the EU but also for other European international organizations, such as the CoE and NATO.[33] European regional international society has consequently become heavily reliant on forms of conditionality and monitoring.

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1 See Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977); Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2009); *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992); "Systems of States," *Review of International Studies* 16 (1990), 99–109; "Hedley Bull. States Systems and International Societies," *Review of International Studies* 13 (1987), 147–55.

[2] Yannis A. Stivachtis and Mark Webber, "Regional International Society in a Post-Enlargement Europe," in Yannis A. Stivachtis and Mark Webber (eds), *Europe After Enlargement*, special issue, *Journal of European Integration* 33:2 (2011), 101–16, 110; Yannis A. Stivachtis, *The Enlargement of International Society* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 89. See also Yannis A. Stivachtis, "International Society: Global/Regional Dimensions and Geographic Expansion," in Robert A. Denemark (ed.), *The International Studies Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Volume VII, 4543–61.

[3] This refers to the Gemeinschaft (community) vs. Gesellschaft (society) dichotomy proposed by Ferdinand Tönnies.

[4] Barry Buzan, "From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School," *International Organization* 47 (1993), 333.

[5] Yannis A. Stivachtis, "Civilization and International Society: The Case of European Union Expansion," *Contemporary Politics* 14:1 (2008), 71–90 and "Civilizing' the Post-Soviet/Socialist Space: An English School Approach to State Socialization in Europe – The Cases of NATO and the Council of Europe," *Perspectives: Central European Review of International Relations* 18:2, (2010), 5–32.

[6] Buzan, "From International System to International Society," 344–5.

[7] Yannis A. Stivachtis and Mark Webber (eds), *Europe after Enlargement*, special issue of the *Journal of European Integration*, 33:2 (2011); Yannis A. Stivachtis, "The Overlapping of Regional International Societies: The Case of the Transatlantic Community and the European Union," in Akis Kalaitzidis (ed.), *Global Politics in the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Athens: ATINER, 2010), 389–409.

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[9] Roger Morgan, "A European 'society of states' – but only states of mind?," *International Affairs* 76:3, (1999), 559–74.

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- [14] Mark Webber, "NATO: Within and Between European International Society," Yannis A. Stivachtis and Mark Webber (eds), *Europe After Enlargement*, 139-58.
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- [16] Georgeta Pourchot, "The OSCE: A Pan-European Society in the Making?" in Yannis A. Stivachtis and Mark Webber (eds), *Europe After Enlargement*, 179-96.
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- [18] Pourchot, "The OSCE: A Pan-European Society in the Making?"
- [19] Laust Schouenborg, *The Scandinavian International Society: Primary Institutions and Binding Forces, 1815-2010* (Routledge: London, 2012).
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- [21] Richard Sakwa, "Russia and Europe: Whose Society?" in Yannis A. Stivachtis and Mark Webber (eds), *Europe After Enlargement*, 197-214.
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[30] Yannis A. Stivachtis, "Understanding the European Union's Enlargement: The International Society Approach of the English School," in Howard Hensel (ed.), *The United States and Europe: Policy Imperatives in a Globalizing World*, Global Interdisciplinary Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 55-77; Andrea Riemer and Yannis A. Stivachtis, "European Union's Enlargement, the English School and the Expansion of Regional International Societies" in Andrea Riemer and Yannis A. Stivachtis (eds), *Understanding European Union's Mediterranean Enlargement: The English School and the Expansion of Regional International Society* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 15-40.

[31] Stivachtis, "Civilization and International Society" and "Civilizing' the Post- Soviet/Socialist Space: An English School Approach to State Socialization in Europe."

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