



# Towards a bright future of regionalism

## By Qian Qichen

**The long evolution of globalization has delivered great progress to our world.**

**The deeply rooted ideas of a market economy and market-oriented institutions have created miracles of technological innovation and economic prosperity unprecedented in human history.**

HOWEVER, THE MODERN STORY of globalization has left behind heavy lessons. The vicious competition among nation-states triggered two tragic world wars, bringing catastrophe to human society. Imperialist policies should be held responsible for these disastrous conflicts. Facing a new wave of globalization today, we ought to reflect on these historical lessons in order to prevent future misfortune.

In the process of accelerated globalization, we are witnessing the rise of new forms of regional cooperation. These developments – the eastbound enlargement of the European Union (EU), the making of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the establishment of the African Union (AU), and the enlargement and deepening of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – are prompting us to reconsider the role of regionalism in a globalized world. It is my belief that regionalization and globalization are parallel processes that are not in conflict; open regionalism is a necessary supplement to multilateralism. More significantly, I believe that regionalism can provide a suitable framework for responding to the challenges posed by globalization, and can pave the way for proper governance that can eliminate “beggar thy neighbor” competition among nation-states.

A number of factors contribute to the worldwide emergence of regionalism. First of all, countries involved in regional cooperation are geographically adjacent to each other and have intensive exchanges and cooperation on economic, social and political matters. They tend to

deepen regional cooperation in order to handle the common pressures they face from global competition. Secondly, a similar cultural background makes it convenient for them to communicate with each other. For instance, East Asian countries are closer to each other in cultural identity than many Western analysts recognize, and their cultural affinity is conducive to regional cooperation. The third factor is related to considerations of international politics. Constrained by domestic politics, it is more difficult to strike compromises on bilateral frictions caused by issues of history and security. But if we discuss these politically sensitive disputes in a broader regional framework, countries may find it easier to accommodate each other.

Today, East Asia is in the best period of its modern history. The region as a whole enjoys rapid economic growth, social and political stability, and peaceful international relations. At the same time, the influence of East Asia is growing markedly worldwide. With lessons of globalization and modern history in mind, people in East Asia should cherish these hard-won achievements. More meaningfully, we should make more collective efforts to grasp this historic opportunity to set better conditions for future development and peace in East Asia.

Personally, I would like to propose that we make progress in the following areas in order to promote regional cooperation in East Asia:

- First, countries in this region should enhance mutual understanding, consolidate a foundation of trust, and cultivate a sense of regional

*It is my belief that regionalization and globalization are parallel processes that are not in conflict.*

*We should have enough political courage not to allow these quarrels to obstruct the way towards higher levels of regional cooperation.*

identity. In the past, colonial rule separated East Asians; in the Cold War, ideological confrontation divided the region. In this new century, countries in the region should promote all levels of interaction, including not only intergovernmental exchanges, but also those in areas of the private sector such as education, the media and non-governmental organizations.

- Secondly, we should try to solve problems that arise in the course of regional cooperation with a pragmatic spirit. Nowadays, there are many forces favorable to cooperation, reflected in intra-regional trade and investment expansion. But there are also factors unfavorable to regionalization and these difficulties may involve disputes over territory and territorial seas, uneven development among nations, regional security arrangements, the relations with major powers outside the region, and so on. We need to take care of each other's interests with mutual respect and consultation on an equal footing. We should have enough political courage not to allow these quarrels to obstruct the way towards higher levels of regional cooperation.
- Thirdly, we should allow the easier parts of regional cooperation to go first. We could pursue more overlapping interests in areas such as trade, investment, tourism, non-traditional security, and sharing development experience and assistance. These issues should be a top priority. Also, we need to give more consideration and incentives to underdeveloped and middle- and small-sized countries in order to make regional cooperation more attractive to them.

- Finally, regional cooperation in Asia should be open and not exclusive. As a vivid example, members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum have included countries in Oceania, East Asia, North America, and Pacific Latin America. East Asian countries have established close connections with the Pacific region, and other areas of Asia, Africa, and Europe. While pushing regional integration forward in East Asia, we should maintain dialogue and cooperation with these other regions with the aim of stabilizing relations and deepening economic cooperation.

China has made endeavors to promote the cause of regional cooperation in East Asia. "Never seek hegemony" and "peaceful development" are sincere policy declarations made by the Chinese government. Specifically, China's East Asia policy is committed to three rationales, including "good neighborhood", "peace to neighbors" and "prosperity to neighbors." These policies fit the reality of international relations in the region, and also serve China's national interests. China believes that by joining collective efforts with all countries in the area, East Asia will enter a new period of regional cooperation. The future of East Asia lies in open regionalism and deeper integration. It is not only beneficial to peace and development in the region, but also helpful to meeting the challenges of globalization.

**Qian Qichen is the former Vice-Premier of the State Council, The People's Republic of China.**