

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AS A MEANS OF IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

V. V. Zazerskaya<sup>1</sup>, S. A. Bunko<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D in Economics, associate professor Dean of Faculty of Economics, Brest State Technical University, Brest, Belarus, e-mail: zazerskaya@mail.ru

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D in Economics, Deputy Dean of Faculty of Economics, Brest State Technical University, Brest, Belarus, e-mail: swetlanabunko@mail.ru

### Abstract

The development of economic cooperation and integration between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus can greatly contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A critical analysis of globalization and localization processes, taking into account external challenges, made it possible to assess the regulatory measures used by states to protect their own economic interests and identified the most common ones - subsidizing local producers and methods of tariff regulation. The tendencies causing uncertainty of the international relations at the present stage are shown. The article analyzes economic integration, reveals its economic, social and environmental essence within the framework of the concept of sustainable development, traces economic relations in various types of regional economic integration. Criteria are proposed for constructing a typology of regional integration unions based on the institutional and economic approach, taking into account evolutionary and territorial characteristics.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, globalization, deglobalization, economic integration, region, type, cross-border cooperation, global supply chains, protectionism.

## РЕГИОНАЛЬНАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ КАК СРЕДСТВО РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ ЦЕЛЕЙ УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ

В. В. Зазерская, С. А. Бунко

### Реферат

Развитие экономического сотрудничества и интеграции между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Беларусь может в значительной степени содействовать реализации Повестки дня в области устойчивого развития на период до 2030 года. Критический анализ глобализационных и локализационных процессов с учетом внешних вызовов позволил дать оценку мер регулирования, применяемых государствами для защиты собственных экономических интересов, и выявил наиболее распространенные – субсидирование местных производителей и методы тарифного регулирования. Показаны тенденции, обуславливающие неопределенность международных отношений на современном этапе. В статье анализируется экономическая интеграция, раскрывается ее экономическая, социальная и экологическая сущности в рамках концепции устойчивого развития, прослеживаются экономические отношения при различных типах региональной экономической интеграции. Предложены критерии для построения типологии региональных интеграционных союзов на основе институционально-экономического подхода с учетом эволюционных и территориальных характеристик.

**Ключевые слова:** устойчивое развитие, глобализация, деглобализация, экономическая интеграция, регион, тип, трансграничное сотрудничество, глобальные цепи поставок, протекционизм.

### Introduction

The concept of sustainable development, the commitment to which the absolute majority of countries demonstrate, in 2015, in the context of the growth of globalization processes, was further developed, which was reflected in the adopted Agenda for the period up to 2030. With the signing of this document, the member countries of the UN have committed themselves to ensuring sustainable and progressive economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection for the benefit of all, in partnership and in peace. To specify the goals set in the 2030 Agenda, a document was developed [1], which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the level of the governments of the countries that joined the 2030 Agenda, the planning of priority development goals in the framework of achieving the goals set for the world community was carried out on the basis of national interests and their own level of development.

The Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, despite some differences in terminology, also adhere to the principles of sustainable development. In the Russian Federation, the principles of sustainable development are reflected in the form of national development goals of the Russian Federation until 2030, determined by the Decree of the President of Russia dated July 21, 2020. No. 474 [2]. In the Republic of Belarus, the goals of the 2030 Agenda are reflected in the Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus until 2030 [3].

However, since 2020, the world community has faced a number of challenges that threaten international cooperation in the field of sustainable development. The COVID -19 pandemic, which began at the end of 2019, caused a series of upheavals in the global economy, as a result of

which, both in the scientific community and in the media, the mention of the term “deglobalization” has increased several times. Undoubtedly, interest in this concept increased significantly back in 2017, with the coming to power in the United States of D. Trump, as well as the escalation of the European crisis, which led to the UK's exit from the European Union. The processes currently taking place affect the established world order, therefore, a predictive assessment of their duration, the possibility of stabilizing the situation and returning to the pre-crisis mutual influence of countries, or understanding the irreversibility of rapidly occurring changes and the need to change approaches to managing the sustainable development of countries is necessary.

The purpose of the study is to determine the impact of economic integration on the sustainable development of regional economies. The object of research is the sphere of economic integration of the world community. The subject of the study is a set of international economic relations and instruments in the form of economic integration that determine a long-term strategy for sustainable development. The authors put forward a hypothesis that integration associations contribute to the development of regions, taking into account the goals of the concept of sustainable development.

### Globalization and localization processes in the modern world

Since the beginning of 2020, with the spread of the coronavirus infection, which primarily affected labor migration, tourism, government protection of domestic markets, it seemed that the popularity of the topic of deglobalization had reached peak values. However, the intensification of the geopolitical crisis, the economic and political confrontation of countries

in 2022 and the political confrontation between countries, lead to a further destruction of the established flows of goods and factors of production. Before characterizing the ongoing processes as "deglobalization", let's consider what is actually understood by globalization in the modern scientific world.

Note that there are numerous definitions of globalization, in which this category is associated with international cooperation, intensification of international trade, unification of manufacturing standards [4, p. one; 2, p. 524, 5–7]. They are more inclined to agree with the idea of globalization as a process of reproductive transformation of national economies and their economic structures, capital, securities, goods, services, labor, in which the world economy is considered not just as the sum (set) of national economies, financial, monetary, legal, information systems, but as an integral single geo-economic (geo-financial) population (space), functioning according to its own laws" [6, p. 126]. In our opinion, it would be appropriate to compare the world economy with the "barge economy", on which any plant can be located, moving in time and space in order to take advantage of the advantages of various countries of the world in cheaper labor, tax and other benefits, and favorable exchange rate differences. between currencies, etc. [7, p. 51-52] , that is, it is not only about integration or free mutually beneficial exchange of goods, free movement of capital, human and other resources, but the inclusion of producers from different countries in global value chains.

At the same time, in addition to the advantages of free movement of factors of production, the accelerated development of the scientific and technological process, the growth of countries' GDP, the processes of globalization " limit the ability of national governments to regulate the economy of their countries, which means a partial loss of economic sovereignty" [8].

Moreover, it would be wrong to confine globalization to the economic sphere. So, some researchers, in addition to economic globalization, which is understood as the market interchange of goods, capital, services and information, also distinguish political and social globalization [9].

Based on the foregoing, deglobalization can be interpreted as a set of processes accompanied by a break in global value chains, the desire of states to restore independence in the political, economic and other spheres by reducing the influence of international relations and organizations.

The deglobalization of the world economy is also manifested in the strengthening of protectionism. The total number of protectionist measures in various areas introduced between 2009 and 2022 is shown in table 1.

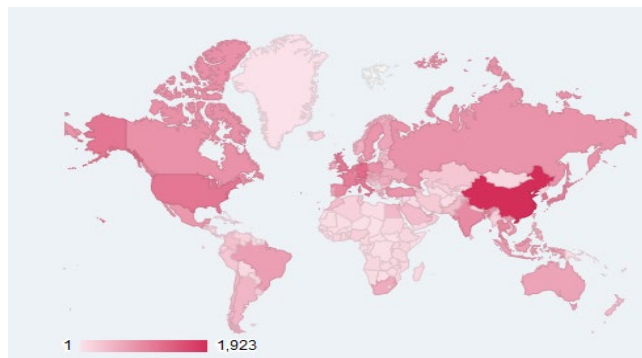
**Table 1** – Number of protectionist measures taken in the period 2009-2022

Measures introduced	Quantity
Subsidies (other than export subsidies)	18815
Export related measures (including export subsidies)	7060
Tariff regulation	3029
trade protection measures	2201
Trade-Related Investment Measures	1076
Public Procurement Restrictions	935
Licensing, setting quotas, etc..	779
Regulation of foreign direct investment	468
Capital controls	237
Migration control measures	231
Price controls, including additional taxes and fees	116
financial measures	24
Intellectual property measures	5
Technical barriers to trade	2
Sanitary and phytosanitary measures	one
Other	271

Source: own development based on [9]

The quantitative assessment of regulatory measures presented in the table, applied by states to protect their own economic interests, shows that the most common measures are subsidizing local producers and methods of tariff regulation.

The main initiator of protectionism is the United States. Contrary to popular belief that this policy is the result of D. Trump's actions, during the tenure of President B. Obama, the number of restrictive measures in trade and financial relations against the G20 countries increased from 50 to 150 from 2013 to 2016. In As a response, the G20 countries pursued policies that, in turn, contradicted the interests of American companies. Most restrictive measures are aimed at establishing artificial barriers to foreign trade, with China being the main object of restrictions to create obstacles to its expansion into national markets (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** – Distribution of countries by number of protectionist measures [9]

The top five countries in respect of which the largest number of restrictive measures have been taken are China - 1923, Germany - 1251, USA - 1149, Republic of Korea - 1128, Italy - 1110. According to Global Dynamics, the Russian Federation ranks 17th (840), the Republic of Belarus - 58th place (380).

Unlike previous problems that periodically arose in the global supply chain, this crisis affected all its links, all logistics participants, and almost simultaneously. The functioning of the global supply chain was also negatively affected by processes such as border closures, labor shortages, difficulties in delivering goods, especially to distant markets, etc. The crisis, which is called the destruction of the global supply chain, has a serious destructive effect on the existing global interaction system. (global supply chain disruption).

Describing the changes in the balance of power, spheres of influence, channels of commodity circulation in the world economy, V. L. Gursky singled out the trends that cause the uncertainty of international relations in the modern world. stage: firstly, this is exacerbation fight between states per technological dominance caused by the transition to a new technological order; secondly, exacerbation fight between TNK and state structures per control above resources, caused by the growing might TNK and them aspiration get rid of from control co sides states [5].

As the main factor in the aggravation of relations, V.L. Gursky singled out the desire to dominate and dictate their terms in the markets , since this becomes the most important competitive advantage, allowing not only to strengthen their positions and reduce the cost of their products, but also to weaken competitors, blocking them access to important resources.

In the current geopolitical environment and increasing deglobalization, more and more attention is being shifted to regional integration. For Belarus, the closest integration is characteristic of the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on April 2, 1997 signed an agreement on the creation of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, which is a supranational organization, with the stated goal of deepening relations between the two states through integration in economic and defense policy. The current goal of the Union State is mainly aimed at economic integration, taxation, and the integration of the defense and intelligence apparatus. Based on the analysis of the strategic goals of sustainable development of these countries, a comparative description of the national development goals of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in the main areas is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** – Comparative characteristics of the national development goals of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in the main areas

Russian Federation	Republic of Belarus
<i>Ending poverty everywhere in all its forms</i>	
– reduction of the poverty level by 2 times compared to the indicator of 2017;	Reducing the share of the population with incomes below the subsistence level to 3-4% (2015 - 5.1%)
<i>Ensuring a healthy lifestyle</i>	
– ensuring sustainable growth of the population of the Russian Federation; – increase in life expectancy up to 78 years; – an increase in the proportion of citizens systematically engaged in physical culture and sports, up to 70%;	creation of conditions for stabilization at the level of 9.4-9.5 million people. (2015 - 9.49 million people) – increase in life expectancy up to 77 years; reduction in the incidence rate by 10% and the severity of primary disability of the population up to 60%
<i>Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</i>	
– ensuring the country's GDP growth rate above the world average while maintaining macroeconomic stability; – Ensuring the rate of sustainable growth of incomes of the population and the level of pension provision not lower than inflation;	Ensuring GDP growth for 2016-2030 by 1.5-2.0 times (annual GDP per capita by 2030 is 30-39 thousand US dollars; 2015 - 18.2 thousand US dollars); Registered unemployment rate, as a percentage of the economically active population The ratio of the average pension by age and the budget of the subsistence minimum of a pensioner is at least 2.5 times
<i>Building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation</i>	
– real growth of investments in fixed assets by at least 70% compared to 2020; – real growth in exports of non-commodity non-energy goods of at least 70% compared to 2020; – an increase in investments in domestic solutions in the field of information technology by 4 times compared to 2019.	Domestic spending on research and development up to 3 % of GDP (2015 - 0.5); The share of innovative products in the total volume of shipped products of industrial organizations up to 25% (2015-13.1%), an increase in the share of high-tech activities in industrial production from 3.2 in 2015 to 8-10 percent in 2030; growth in the share of exports in the volume of industrial production from 57.9 in 2015 to 70 percent in 2030
<i>Ensuring openness, security, resilience and environmental sustainability of cities and towns</i>	
– improving the quality of the urban environment by one and a half times; – ensuring the share of the road network in the largest urban agglomerations that meets regulatory requirements at a level of at least 85%; – creation of a sustainable municipal solid waste management system that ensures waste sorting in the amount of 100 percent and reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills by half; – halving emissions of hazardous pollutants that have the greatest negative impact on the environment and human health.	full provision of social standards of living standards in all regions of the republic. Emissions of pollutants into the atmospheric air from stationary and mobile sources, up to 91% as a percentage by 2010 (2015 - 95.4) Increase the share of solid municipal waste recycling up to 40% (2015-15.6%) Bring the index of discharge of insufficiently treated wastewater into water bodies to zero, Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as a percentage by 1990 to 28% (2015-35) Bring total spending on environmental protection, as a percentage of GDP, to 2-3% (2015 - 1.1%) International ranking of Belarus on the environmental performance index, number 25 (2015 - 32)

Source: own development based on [1, 3]

Throughout the entire period of the existence of the union state of Russia and Belarus, real integration of the two states along the stated directions did not happen. In our opinion, at present the most promising is the integration between individual regions of Belarus and Russia. This, in turn, requires a more scientific approach to building integration institutions and choosing areas of cooperation, studying the theory and practical experience in implementing regional integration.

**Integration processes: regional aspect**

The creation of integration unions helps to reduce differences in socio-economic development between the countries participating in the integration, and also provides access to the least developed countries (regions) to global supply chains and value added, which in turn favorably affects the maximum use of alternative advantages and reducing production costs, which makes the goals of the concept of sustainable development more achievable.

In modern regionalism, two main approaches can be distinguished to explain the process of integration of territories: as a set of interactions (flows) through border areas, but limited by the effects of border barriers, and as a process of convergence of territorial characteristics to increase homogeneity (similar to development models) by reducing their disproportions (territorial gaps). This makes it possible to assert that the theory cross-border relations are based mainly on the territorial approach.

As a rule, the interaction of border regions reveals disproportions in the development of territories, factors of production inefficiently used in

the economy of the region, which makes it possible to level these trends in the future. In this case, for the formation of the territorial basis of interaction, the coordination of market relations, the mechanisms of state regulation are primary.

Let's highlight the types of regional economic integration:

- interstate economic integration (free trade zones, customs unions, common market, economic union) [11], which eliminates barriers to trade with the implementation of various levels of measures to protect the domestic market;
- integration at the micro level, which is based on private foreign direct investment. One of the forms of interstate economic integration is cross-border cooperation.

Types of cross-border cooperation between regions aimed at developing relations between territorial-administrative units or authorities of bordering states through the conclusion of agreements in the socio-economic, scientific-cultural, natural-climatic sphere in order to realize the common interests of local governments can be two-, three- or multilateral cooperation:

- cross-border cooperation - between local authorities and self-government (public and private business entities can also be included in this context) in geographically adjacent territories. This also applies to territories separated by the sea;
- inter-territorial cooperation - between local authorities and self-government (public and private actors can also be included in this context) between non-contiguous territories;

- transnational cooperation - cooperation between national, local authorities and self-government on transnational programs and projects. This form of cooperation covers large contiguous territories and includes entities from at least two EU member states and/or non-EU countries.

Thus, cooperation within the framework of adjacent territories of neighboring states can be called transboundary cooperation, that is, the presence of a border between cooperating territories is decisive. The basis of cooperation is the process of creating links and contractual relations in the border areas in order to find solutions to identical problems. It implements economic, political, environmental, cultural and educational types of international activities, which are carried out at the regional level and are distinguished by the general use of natural resources and the solution of security problems, wider mutual communication between the population of neighboring states and personal connections of people, a significantly higher burden on infrastructure (roads, communications, services, roadside infrastructure).

The basis of the institutional and economic relations of the regions are institutions, which are understood as "the rules of the game in society, or, to put it more formally, the restrictive framework created by man that organizes the relationship between people" [12, p.17]

The institutionalized form of regional cooperation is especially relevant in connection with the leveling of differences through the application of generally accepted and legalized norms in the legal field, which affects the built algorithms of mutual activity, the overall development strategy, and the autonomy of decision-making. The level of institutionalization becomes the criterion for selecting the type of region.

The legal environment creates legal mechanisms for regulating the cooperation of regions, turning the daily practice of cross-border interactions into formalized institutions of cooperation.

At the initial stage, the most common forms of cooperation are agreements on trade and economic cooperation, concluded at the initiative of the regions. The basis for concluding agreements may be the stabilization of industrial relations, the expansion of cooperation in the scientific, technical and cultural spheres. The problematic point is the framework nature of such documents, because they often indicate areas and areas of cooperation, but there is no practical implementation. The second form is councils, working groups and commissions for cross-border cooperation, which are usually part of intergovernmental commissions, which makes it possible to unite "regional and national authorities of border states to solve important problems - delimitation and demarcation of the border, development of checkpoints and access roads to them, organization of transport communication, etc." [18, p.35]. The third form is cross-border cooperation programs. The validity period is 5-7 years. The purpose of developing programs is to strengthen the peripheral nature of the economy, eliminate the gap in production ties between economic entities and solve the demographic problems of the regions.

An analysis of the essential characteristics of regional integration unions shows the objective need to build their typology in order to develop a common development strategy for countries and regions for gradual integration into the world economy. The main types of regional economic integration include:

Free trading zone. This is the main form of economic cooperation. Member countries remove all barriers to trade among themselves, but are free to determine trade policy with non-member countries.

Customs Union. Priority in this case is given to economic cooperation, the removal of barriers to trade between member countries. The main difference from a free trade area is that members agree to treat trade with non-member countries in a similar way.

Common Market. This type allows the creation of economically integrated markets between member countries. Trade barriers are being removed, as are any restrictions on the movement of labor and capital between member countries, there is a common trade policy for trade with non-member countries. The main advantage is the openness of the labor market to the labor force of the member countries of the common market.

Economic Union. It is created with the intention of countries not only to remove barriers to trade, but also to follow a common economic policy.

To build a typology of regional integration unions based on the institutional and economic approach, taking into account evolutionary and

territorial characteristics, we consider the following criteria [13, p.19]:

1. Development stages:
  - a) exchange of information, contacts at the level of regional and local authorities, conclusion of framework agreements;
  - b) foreign trade, formation of foreign trade infrastructure;
  - b) creation of joint ventures, institutions of coordination in various areas of cooperation;
  - r) micro-integration based on the formation of integrated local markets for goods, services, labor, technologies, etc.
2. The dominant level in the management of interregional and border relations. As a rule, there are national, regional and interstate levels of government. The national or regional level of government dominates.
3. Models of border and interregional relations:
  - a) traditional model: based on differences between countries and their regions (differences in prices for goods, exchange rates, etc.);
  - b) preferential model: based on a set of preferences within a certain territory, for example, a border area (tariffs, tax and financial and credit benefits), or in order to stimulate links in certain areas;
  - b) partnership model: based on the principles of administrative and political decentralization, which is embodied in the special powers of local authorities, as well as joint mechanisms for solving common problems of the territory.
4. Degree of institutionalization of cross-border cooperation:
  - a) Euroregion. The most common form of cooperation between cross-border regions, covering the adjacent border areas of states that are distinguished by a certain economic, socio-cultural, ethnic unity;
  - b) free economic zones;
  - b) technopark.

Regional cooperation is associated not only with geographical characteristics, but also with functional, sectoral and institutional planes, which also influence the regional and contribute to the free movement of goods, services, capital and people. We propose the following approach to identify institutional and economic types of regional integration cooperation based on the above criteria: framework integration, surface integration; rational integration.

Framework integration is based on weak expression of cooperation institutions. The leading type of interaction is regional trade agreements to eliminate tariff barriers and the development of border trade. The main areas of cooperation are related to agreements regulating the regime and arrangement of the border, and the prevention of border incidents. Agreements, with the exception of those related to trade liberalization, are devoid of specific commitments and are limited to declarations of intent.

Superficial integration is typical for regions (states) that are heterogeneous in terms of economy, social and state structure. Integration is based on market mechanisms with a high level of sovereignty between the members of the association. Regional trade agreements are concluded, including long-term directions on trade in services, investment, competition and public procurement. Integration takes on some features of the common market by focusing on regulatory issues and dispute resolution mechanisms. A trading bloc can be created on the basis of free membership with subsequent institutional reorganization into a free trade zone.

Rational integration of regions is institutionalized cooperation between member regions. It implies the presence of certain features (although, perhaps, not fully formed) - a common market or a monetary union. A market approach with a rigid institutional framework and a supranational formation is characteristic.

### **Conclusion**

The current stage of development of the world economy is characterized by signs of increasing deglobalization, which will inevitably lead to a change in the architecture of sustainable development management as a doctrine adopted by most countries of the world community. More and more researchers suggest that in the near future cooperation between countries will gravitate towards regional cooperation. In this situation, it becomes relevant for Belarus to identify strategic partners and design the architecture of cross-border cooperation, which leads to the need for more scientific approaches to its development. Understanding the charac-

teristics and challenges of modern regionalism is becoming increasingly fundamental, given that the influence of recent economic and political factors has demonstrated the need for more effective regional responses. The study showed the specific phenomenological nature of economic development as a basic concept for determining the conditions for the development of cross-border regions and, on this basis, a typology of regions, the essence of which is considered within the framework of evolutionary and revolutionary approaches and is based on the concepts of globalization and regionalization. An institutional-economic approach is proposed that takes into account the interaction of socio-economic and organizational-economic relations and their connection with the productive forces of the region. To build a typology of regional integration unions based on the institutional and economic approach, taking into account evolutionary and territorial characteristics, the following criteria are considered: the stage of development, the level in the management of inter-regional and border relations, the mechanism for the formation of border and interregional relations, the degree of institutionalization of cross-border cooperation. Based on the above criteria identified institutional and economic types of regional integration cooperation: framework integration, surface integration; rational integration.

In the current geopolitical environment and increasing deglobalization, more and more attention is being shifted to regional integration. For Belarus, the closest integration is characteristic of the Russian Federation. The authors draw the following conclusions: the development of integration at the regional level provides a triad of sustainable development: economy - social sphere - ecology ; in terms of the impact of economic integration, there is a need to reduce restrictive protectionist measures in the field of economic integration, mechanisms to improve the efficiency of regional economies and reach a new level of development in the framework of achieving sustainable development goals by creating efficient supply chains and strengthening industrial cooperation between the countries included in the integration ; a deeper economic integration of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus is expedient for the sustainable development of national societies.

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