

Geopolitical Challenges of Regional Integration

Case study: Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Regional organizations are formed by states located in an area in order to cooperate in economic, political, scientific, and military features and attain the objectives. Nowadays in addition to quantitative expansion, Regional organizations have effective developments in the international system. Some organizations such as European Union and ASEAN have had very significant successes. Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is an intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states. It was the successor of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) founded in 1964 following Baghdad Pact which founded in 1955. Some objectives of Economic Cooperation Organization are removal of trade barriers and promotion of intra-regional trade; developing transport & communication infrastructures linking the member states and connecting them to the international community; mobilizing and utilizing ECO regional material resources; regional cooperation to combat drug trafficking, ecological and environmental protection and strengthening the historical and cultural ties among the peoples of the ECO region. 25 years after the establishment of the ECO, studies show that the achievements of the organization do not match with the aims and prospects enshrined in numerous agreements, protocols and prospects and desires of the founders as well as other member states. This means that cooperation and convergence among the members of organization is weak, hence different course of actions are emerged from different views. This study investigates the challenges of cooperation and the weak convergence among ECO member states through Political geography perspective.

Methodology

This paper seeks to answer the question: "What are the roles of Geopolitical challenges that weaken the convergence and cause the Failure of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)?" To answer the question, this paper has used descriptive - analytical methods and documentation. So, at first the main geopolitical challenge in the ECO region has been

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identified and then the relationship between each geopolitical challenge in respect to weak convergence has been analyzed.

Discussion

In an article, discussing and investigating all Geopolitical challenges relating to integration among the ECO member countries and their roles in weakening the convergence of the members, seems impossible, but the most important geopolitical challenges that some of them have different dimensions were studied. These challenges are as follows: 1. landlocked countries in ECO region; 2. territorial and border disputes; 3. numerous neighbor states; 4. the Caspian Sea legal regime; 5. the reasons of states and their history; 6. minorities; 7. the differences between political and economic systems; 8. centralized and centrifugal forces; 9. authoritarian regimes and weak democracy; 10. the differences in levels of development among ECO member states.

Conclusion

The results showed that all of the mentioned geopolitical challenges are effective in weakening the convergence, and vice versa in strengthening the divergence of ECO member states. More stability of geopolitical issues in respect to the other areas, whereas these issues played negative roles in the past, will cause in the future negative impacts on regional collaboration and integration in ECO region. The evidences also show that most of these challenges are related to 7 states (particularly the Central Asian member states of ECO) that joined to the organization in 1992.

Keywords: Integration, Divergence, Political Geography, Regional Organization, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).