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Mechanisms for Coordinating Foreign Policy Strategies of States Within Modern Regional Integration Associations

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ABSTRACT

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This article examines the peculiarities of coordinating the foreign policy directions of states within modern regional integration associations under conditions of international environment transformation and the intensification of global challenges. The relevance of the topic is determined by the necessity to align the national interests of member countries with the collective objectives of regional cooperation. Among the key issues identified are uneven political priorities among states, differences in levels of integration and interaction, and difficulties in developing common decisions in international policy. The purpose of the study is to identify the main instruments for coordinating foreign policy actions within integration associations and to assess their effectiveness in contemporary geopolitical conditions. Comparative, systemic, and institutional approaches were applied in the research process together with methods of political analysis, forecasting, and generalization of international practice. An examination of the activities of the European Union, ASEAN, the African Union, and MERCOSUR enabled the identification of specific features of interstate interaction models in the sphere of foreign policy. Findings demonstrate that the highest level of effectiveness is achieved through mechanisms based on institutional coherence, diplomatic dialogue, and multilevel cooperation. The obtained results indicate that regional integration structures are gradually strengthening their role in international relations by developing common positions on security, economic, and humanitarian issues. At the same time, the effectiveness of collective actions depends on political trust among participants, stability of institutional systems, and the ability to respond to changes in the international environment. The article proposes a conceptual approach to assessing the effectiveness of foreign policy interaction, encompassing institutional, strategic, communicative, security, and diplomatic components, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the degree of coordination in international decision-making and the effectiveness of joint activities among participating states. Conclusions substantiate that improving the mechanisms of foreign policy interaction is an important prerequisite for strengthening regional stability, enhancing the international influence of integration associations, and ensuring an effective response to contemporary challenges. Prospects for further research include analyzing the digitalization of diplomatic processes, developing multilateral cooperation and adapting integration models to the new conditions of global politics.

KEYWORDS

participating states, digitalization of diplomatic processes, political trust, global challenges, foreign policy, international interaction, regional cooperation, integration processes, multilateral diplomacy, geopolitical transformations, institutional interaction, international security, political consensus.



Механізми координації зовнішньополітичних стратегій держав у межах сучасних регіональних інтеграційних об'єднань

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СТАТТЯ

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У статті досліджено особливості координації зовнішньополітичних курсів держав у межах сучасних регіональних інтеграційних об'єднань в умовах трансформації міжнародного середовища та зростання глобальних викликів. Актуальність теми зумовлена потребою узгодження національних інтересів учасників інтеграційних структур із колективними цілями регіонального співробітництва. Серед значущих проблем виокремлено нерівномірність політичних пріоритетів країн, відмінності у рівнях інтеграційної взаємодії та труднощі ухвалення спільних рішень у сфері міжнародної політики. Метою статті є визначення основних інструментів узгодження зовнішньополітичних дій держав у межах інтеграційних об'єднань і оцінювання їхньої результативності у сучасних геополітичних умовах. У процесі дослідження застосовано порівняльний, системний та інституційний підходи, зокрема методи політичного аналізу, прогнозування й узагальнення міжнародної практики. Вивчення діяльності Європейського Союзу, АСЕАН, Африканського Союзу та МЕРКОСУР дало змогу обґрунтувати специфіку функціонування моделей міждержавної взаємодії у сфері зовнішньої політики. Виявлено, що найбільшу ефективність демонструють механізми, основані на поєднанні інституційної узгодженості, дипломатичного діалогу та багаторівневої співпраці. Отримані результати засвідчують, що регіональні інтеграційні структури поступово посилюють власну роль у міжнародних відносинах, формуючи спільні позиції щодо безпекових, економічних і гуманітарних питань. Водночас рівень результативності колективних дій залежить від політичної довіри між учасниками, стабільності інституційної системи та здатності реагувати на зміни міжнародної кон'юнктури. Запропоновано концептуальний підхід до оцінювання ефективності зовнішньополітичної взаємодії, що охоплює інституційний, стратегічний, комунікаційний, безпековий та дипломатичний складники й забезпечує комплексний аналіз ступеня узгодженості міжнародних рішень та рівня ефективності спільної діяльності держав-учасниць. У висновках обґрунтовано, що удосконалення механізмів зовнішньополітичної взаємодії є важливою передумовою зміцнення регіональної стабільності, підвищення міжнародної ролі інтеграційних об'єднань та забезпечення ефективного реагування на сучасні виклики. Перспективи подальших досліджень пов'язані з аналізом цифровізації дипломатичних процесів, розвитком багатосторонньої співпраці та адаптацією інтеграційних моделей до нових умов глобальної політики.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

держави-учасниці, цифровізація дипломатичних процесів, політична довіра, глобальні виклики, зовнішня політика, міжнародна взаємодія, регіональне співробітництво, інтеграційні процеси, багатостороння дипломатія, геополітичні трансформації, інституційна взаємодія, міжнародна безпека, політичний консенсус.

1. Introduction

Foreign policy interaction of states within regional integration associations plays an important role in ensuring international stability, developing interstate cooperation and forming joint solutions to global problems. The transformation of the international system, increasing security threats, economic instability and intensifying geopolitical competition lead to an increase in the importance of coordinating foreign policy strategies. The main task of integration structures is to form effective mechanisms for coordinating the political interests of member states, capable of ensuring a joint response to international challenges and increasing the effectiveness of diplomatic activities. Coordination of foreign policy strategies is an important component of maintaining regional security, strengthening international partnerships, and developing political interaction between states. In view of this, ensuring effective foreign policy interaction is a complex multi-level process that involves improving institutional mechanisms, developing diplomatic instruments and forming coordinated political decisions. In particular, increasing the effectiveness of coordination structures that can contribute to the efficiency of decision-making and taking into account the interests of all participants in the integration process is of great importance. At the same time, the development of models of international interaction focused on issues of geopolitical transformations, changes in the international security system and the need to adapt integration associations to the dynamics of global politics remains relevant. Special attention deserves the study of the relationship between the level of political coherence of states and the effectiveness of the implementation of joint international initiatives. Thus, optimizing diplomatic coordination mechanisms, improving the procedures for developing joint decisions, increasing the transparency of interstate interaction and developing strategic partnerships are among the basic practical tasks of regional integration associations. In addition, increasing international competition, increasing the number of regional conflicts, intensification of migration processes, energy crises and the consequences of global instability necessitate the adaptation of integration structures to new international realities. Accordingly, scientific and practical research in this area should be aimed at identifying the most effective models of coordination of foreign policy strategies that can ensure the stability of international relations, strengthen interstate cooperation, and effectively respond to global challenges.

2. Literature Review

The analysis of scientific works devoted to regional integration processes and foreign policy coordination demonstrates the diversity of approaches to the study of the interaction of states in multilateral structures. Particular attention in modern scientific thought is paid to the issues of institutionalization of cooperation, asymmetry of influence of participants and mechanisms for the formation of joint political decisions. The strengthening of the security dimension of interregional interaction, in particular in the field of energy cooperation between the European Union (EU) and South Africa, is considered in the study of J. Muntschick, who emphasizes the processes of securitization as a factor in the transformation of coordination mechanisms [1]. In the context of relations between the EU and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), attention is paid to political mediation and the absence of automatic deepening of integration, which is emphasized in the joint study of A. J. J. Soto and co-authors [2]. The environmental challenges within the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement, in particular the issue of sustainable development, are analyzed in detail in the work of R. Palmieri and colleagues, where the emphasis is on regulatory and environmental contradictions [3].

The balance between trade, development and environment within the transatlantic agreements is further revealed in the study of J. Harrison and S. Paulini, who emphasize the complexity of reconciling economic and environmental priorities [4]. In a comparative perspective, the EU and MERCOSUR are viewed as asymmetric integration entities, where the institutional depth of interaction remains limited, which is argued in the work of D. Nolte and C. Correa Ribeiro Neto [5].

Mechanisms of civil society participation in regional integration using the example of MERCOSUR and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are analyzed by H. Ramanzini Jr. and B. Luciano, who point to different levels of institutional openness and involvement of non-state actors [6]. Within the EU, the problem of multi-level governance and integration of state competences is

studied in detail by C. Freudlsperger and M. Jachtenfuchs, who emphasize the gradual expansion of supranational influence [7].

The dynamics of regional integration in the context of global crises, in particular pandemics and the weakening of multilateralism, are examined in the work of S. Chirathivat et al., who compare the adaptation mechanisms of the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) [8]. Political negotiations on the formation of the EU-MERCOSUR agreement, with an emphasis on geopolitical and economic factors, are analyzed by N. Pose-Ferraro, who emphasizes the complexity of balancing the interests of the parties [9].

The structural features of MERCOSUR as a trade association, its limitations and development prospects are studied by A. G. Koval and E. K. Andrianova, who point to the presence of political fragmentation in the region [10]. In the broader global context, the issue of inequality and asymmetry of the world order is revealed by Ş. S. Karataşlı, emphasizing the influence of the global hierarchy on regional processes [11].

Interregional links between ASEAN and MERCOSUR are examined by Ó. E. Fernández-Guillén, who highlights the potential for cooperation between countries of the Global South in the context of growing economic interdependence [12]. The role of global value chains and transport infrastructure in shaping international economic integration is analyzed by R. Lanz and R. Piermartini, who emphasize the critical importance of logistics networks [13].

The institutional aspects of political decision-making in the EU, in particular the role of national parliaments, are examined by A. Tacea, who emphasizes the growing political dimension of legal procedures [14]. The impact of domestic political changes in Germany on EU foreign policy is revealed in the work of L. Röth, who shows the dependence of coordination mechanisms on national political processes [15].

The social determinants of political behavior in Latin America that influence support for integration processes are analyzed by F. A. Borges [16]. In turn, the issues of coalition management and the distribution of political priorities in public administration are considered by H. Klüver and H. Bäck, which allows us to explain the mechanisms of political decision-making [17].

The multi-level nature of trade negotiations is demonstrated in the study by J. Broschek and P. M. Goff on the example of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU, which emphasizes the role of subnational actors in the negotiations [18]. In the field of international politics, the management of nationalism in China is also analyzed, which in the work of O. Burcu is associated with the internal mobilization of political support [19].

The fragmentation of the global trading system and the need for interregional coordination are considered by V. K. Aggarwal and S. Newland, who emphasize the growing role of regional mechanisms for trade management [20]. At the same time, the transformation of global governance in times of crisis, in particular under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, is analyzed by J. Leib, which demonstrates a change in approaches to strategic communication of international organizations [21]. Despite the significant volume of scientific research, a comprehensive analysis of the coordination mechanisms of foreign policy strategies in different types of regional associations in a comparative dimension remains insufficiently covered, which determines the relevance of further research.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of the study is to scientifically substantiate and determine the mechanisms for coordinating foreign policy strategies of states within modern regional integration associations. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of current models of international interaction, the identification of urgent problems of harmonizing the foreign policy interests of the participating states, and the delineation of effective tools for increasing the level of political coherence and the effectiveness of joint decisions within integration structures.

4. Methods and Materials

The study is based on a comprehensive analysis of scientific works and analytical reports devoted to international cooperation, foreign policy of states and functioning of regional integration associations. At the same time, emphasis is placed on studying the mechanisms of coordination of

foreign policy strategies in the context of the transformation of the international environment and the strengthening of global challenges.

The empirical basis is formed by materials of the European Union, ASEAN, African Union and MERCOSUR, in particular analytical reports of foreign policy departments of the participating states. The collected information covers data on procedures of joint decision-making, level of diplomatic coherence, institutional interaction and implementation of joint strategic initiatives in the spheres of security, economy and international cooperation.

Several methods were used in the research process: comparative analysis – to compare models of foreign policy coordination in various regional integration structures, which made it possible to identify common patterns and differences in the functioning of coordination mechanisms and assess their effectiveness; a systemic approach – to consider foreign policy interaction as a multi-level structure that encompasses institutional, political, diplomatic and security components. Institutional analysis contributed to the study of the role of the governing bodies of integration associations in the formation and implementation of joint foreign policy decisions.

Additionally, methods of political analysis and forecasting were used to assess the impact of geopolitical changes, conflict situations and global crisis processes on the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms. Content analysis of official documents, strategies and international agreements provided the definition of the basic principles of harmonizing foreign policy positions of states.

Accordingly, the conceptual modeling method was used to generalize the results, which contributed to the formation of a structural model for assessing the effectiveness of foreign policy strategy coordination, which covers the institutional level of interaction, the degree of political consensus, the intensity of diplomatic communications, the level of security cooperation, and the strategic coherence of decisions.

5. Results and Discussion

The intensification of globalization processes has led to the formation of structured formats of coordination between the member states of regional integration associations, which provide for regular consultations, coordination of positions in the field of international policy and the development of joint approaches to responding to regional and global challenges. Modern integration associations have gradually acquired the functions of platforms for political dialogue and coordination of strategic decisions between the member states.

At the same time, the expansion of the institutional component of regional organizations was accompanied by the formation of existing coordination mechanisms and the development of multi-level diplomatic interaction, which ensured the growth of coordination of foreign policy actions of states and the strengthening of the role of collective representation of interests in international relations.

In addition, the further development of coordination processes is associated with the growing influence of geopolitical changes, which have actualized the need for more flexible and more adaptive forms of interaction. Regional associations of countries have intensified the use of mechanisms for joint response to security threats, economic crises and political conflicts, which required an increase in the level of political coherence and trust between member states.

Accordingly, the practice of the EU demonstrates a developed model of coordination of foreign policy strategies, which combines institutional mechanisms of common foreign policy and regular consultation procedures between member states, and considerable attention is paid to the formation of common positions on international security, sanctions policy and crisis response, which strengthens the influence of the association on the global stage [1].

Against this background, the experience of ASEAN and the African Union reflects a different logic of coordination, where priority is given to consensus decision-making and flexible formats of diplomatic interaction. Such a format helps to take into account the diversity of political interests of member states and ensures the gradual convergence of positions in the field of foreign policy without rigid supranational centralization [2].

The development of coordination mechanisms in regional integration associations is associated with the growing role of joint institutions that ensure not only the coordination of positions but also the formation of long-term foreign policy guidelines. In this context, the importance of strategic planning is increasing, which allows participating states to move from reactive diplomacy to preventive coordination of actions in the international environment.

Specific manifestations of the functioning of coordination mechanisms in various regional integration associations are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Mechanisms for coordinating foreign policy strategies in regional integration associations

Regional integration association	Main coordination mechanisms	Features of functioning
European Union (EU)	Common Foreign and Security Policy, Council of the EU, European External Action Service	High level of institutionalization, formation of agreed positions, binding joint decisions in key areas
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	Consensus approach, annual summits, regional forums	Flexible model of interaction, absence of rigid supranational centralization, priority of political consensus
African Union	Pan-African Parliament, African Union Commission, crisis response mechanisms	Focus on security coordination, gradual strengthening of institutional capacity, dependence on member states
Southern Common Market	Common Market Council, Common Market Group, consultation mechanisms	Economically oriented coordination, limited foreign policy integration, predominance of intergovernmental decisions

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [3–5].

The data presented demonstrate the different levels of institutional design of foreign policy coordination within regional integration associations. The highest degree of formalization is characteristic of the EU, where the combination of supranational structures and joint decision-making mechanisms ensures relatively stable coherence of foreign policy actions [4, p. 731]. At the same time, such a model assumes dependence on the internal political agreement of the participating states, which affects the efficiency of response in crises.

In this process, ASEAN and the African Union form a predominantly intergovernmental type of coordination, dominated by consultative formats and the principle of consensus decision-making. Such a configuration contributes to the flexibility of interaction but limits the level of institutional integration of foreign policy strategies. In particular, MERCOSUR demonstrates a more economically oriented model of cooperation with a limited impact on foreign policy coordination, which further emphasizes the uneven development of integration mechanisms [5, p. 100].

Thus, the results of the comparative analysis give grounds to assert that the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms is determined by the level of institutional integration and the degree of political trust between the participating states. In more structured systems, the ability to form agreed positions in the field of foreign policy is observed, while less institutionalized formats retain a predominantly declarative nature of interaction.

However, among the main problems of coordinating foreign policy interests, the asymmetry of the priorities of states dominates, due to differences in the level of economic development, geopolitical orientations and the scale of international influence. An additional complicating factor is the varying degree of readiness to delegate part of foreign policy powers to the supranational level, which limits the depth of integration and slows down the process of making joint decisions.

At the same time, an important aspect remains the need to form more flexible instruments of interaction that can combine national interests with the collective goals of regional associations. Strengthening coordination capabilities in this area is considered a basic prerequisite for increasing the effectiveness of common foreign policy and strengthening the positions of integration structures in the global system of international relations [6].

Thus, summarizing the results of the comparative analysis, it is noted that the sustainability and effectiveness of coordination mechanisms largely depend on the quality of the institutional environment and the level of trust between the participating states. Thus, in conditions of high institutional organization, a more predictable nature of the coordination of foreign policy decisions and the consistency of their implementation is ensured, while in less formalized models of interaction, fragmentation and limited ability for long-term strategic planning prevail [7, p. 126].

Despite the outlined ways to solve the problem, the identified imbalances in the processes of coordination of foreign policy positions necessitate the improvement of the tools of multilateral interaction, in particular by increasing institutional adaptability and expanding the mechanisms of political coordination. The development of such approaches contributes to a more effective combination

of national priorities with the collective interests of integration associations and strengthening their role in shaping the global architecture of international relations [8, p. 557]. Accordingly, strengthening coordination capabilities in the above areas requires the systematization of interaction tools used within regional integration associations to regulate foreign policy strategies and increase the effectiveness of joint decisions (Table 2).

Table 2. Interaction tools in regional integration associations

Integration environment	Interaction tools	Application nature
Institutionally developed supranational structures	Common Foreign and Security Policy, European Diplomatic Services, Sanctions Mechanisms, Coordination Councils	High level of formalization, mandatory coordination of decisions
Consensus-oriented regional associations	Summits, Regional Forums, Consultative Platforms, Declarative Agreements	Flexible interaction without strict supranational regulation
Security and stabilization-oriented organizations	Crisis Response Mechanisms, Peacekeeping Operations, Political Forums, Coordination Missions	Predominance of the security component, gradual institutionalization
Economically integrated intergovernmental systems	Intergovernmental Councils, Trade and Economic Agreements, Consultative Mechanisms	Limited political coordination, dominance of economic cooperation

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [9–10].

According to the data in Table 2, the differentiation of interaction tools is shown depending on the level of institutional development and functional orientation of regional integration associations. The most extensive system of tools is characteristic of supranational structures, where the combination of diplomatic, legal and coordination mechanisms ensure a high degree of coherence of foreign policy decisions and the stability of joint actions.

In particular, consensus-oriented associations demonstrate the predominance of flexible formats of interaction based on political consultations and declarative agreements. Such a model contributes to the preservation of the autonomy of the participating states, but limits the depth of institutional integration and reduces the speed of formation of common positions.

In structures focused on ensuring security stability, interaction tools are focused mainly on crisis response mechanisms and peacekeeping operations, which reflects the priority of maintaining regional security over political unification. At the same time, economically integrated intergovernmental systems are characterized by the dominance of trade and financial cooperation with limited development of foreign policy coordination, which emphasizes the unevenness of the functional load of integration associations. Substantiation of instruments for increasing the level of political coherence within integration structures involves improving coordination procedures and strengthening institutional interaction between participating states. Of particular importance is the development of stable consultation mechanisms that ensure regular exchange of positions and reduce the risk of political disagreements at the decision-making stage [11, p. 31].

Another important direction is the formation of joint strategic planning systems that make it possible to coordinate foreign policy priorities even before the stage of their implementation. Such an organization of interaction increases the predictability of states' actions and contributes to strengthening trust between participants in integration processes. The development of multi-level diplomatic interaction, which combines interstate and suprastate levels of coordination, is of additional importance. Such a configuration provides a more comprehensive consideration of the interests of the parties and contributes to the formation of balanced decisions in the field of international policy.

In addition, increasing the effectiveness of joint decisions is associated with improving the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating their implementation. The presence of clear indicators of the implementation of agreements ensures the timely detection of deviations and adjustment of joint actions, which enhances the effectiveness of the functioning of integration structures as a whole.

So, summarizing these results, the main stages of improving coordination mechanisms are systematized and their structural sequence is shown (Figure 1).

The proposed sequence of actions is aimed at systematically improving the coordination of foreign policy strategies within regional integration associations. The initial stage involves analyzing the current state of interaction between states, which allows for determining the level of coherence of foreign policy decisions and identifying the main problem areas.

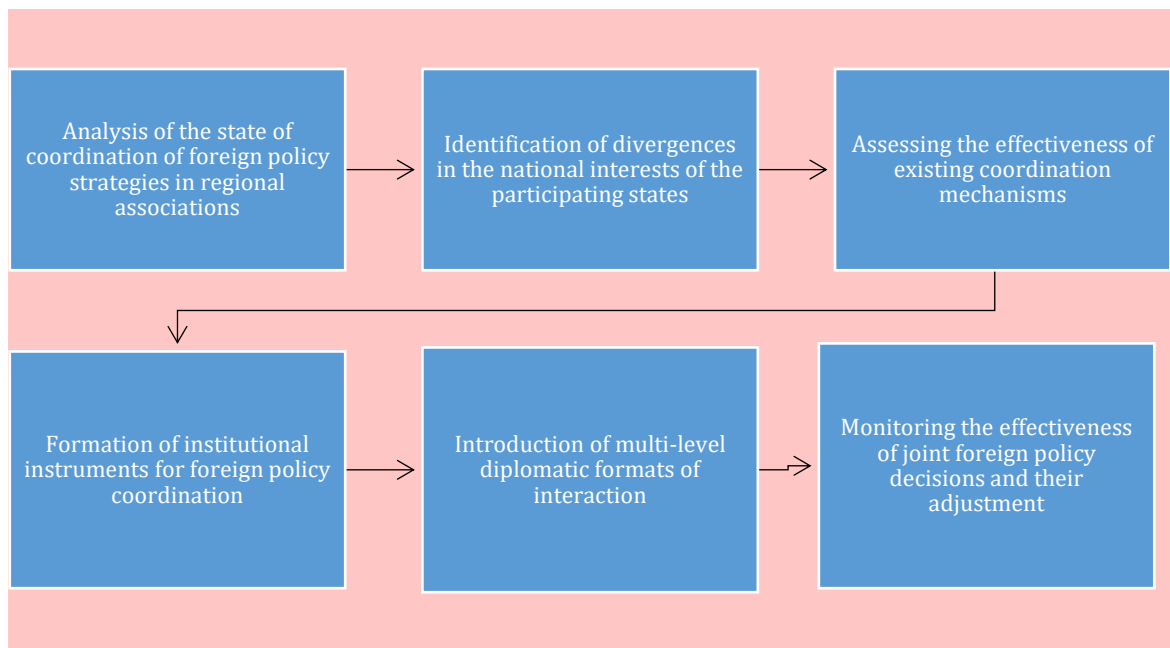


Figure 1. An algorithm for improving mechanisms for coordinating foreign policy strategies within regional integration associations

Source: Compiled by the authors

The next stage is associated with the identification of differences in the national interests of the participating states, which forms the basis for further adjustment of coordination processes. Assessing the effectiveness of existing mechanisms provides a justification for their limitations and the need for institutional modernization.

Further formation of foreign policy coordination instruments involves strengthening the role of common institutions and the development of stable coordination platforms. The introduction of multi-level diplomatic formats contributes to the combination of national and collective interests in the process of making foreign policy decisions.

The final stage of the algorithm includes monitoring the effectiveness of joint decisions and their adjustment in accordance with changes in the international environment, which forms adaptability and increases the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms in the long term.

Thus, the implementation of the proposed algorithm ensures a more coordinated nature of foreign policy interaction, increases the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms and strengthens the institutional capacity of regional integration associations. The consistent implementation of these stages contributes to reducing the level of political disagreements, improving the quality of joint decisions and creating a more stable environment for international cooperation.

6. Conclusions

The study determined that the mechanisms for coordinating foreign policy strategies within regional integration associations differ significantly in terms of the level of institutional maturity and the nature of interaction between the participating states. The most coordinated forms of cooperation are inherent in structures with a developed supranational component, while intergovernmental formats are characterized by the predominance of consultation procedures and less binding joint decisions. It was found that the main barriers to effective coordination are the asymmetry of political priorities, different levels of economic development and limited readiness of states to delegate part of foreign policy powers. It is substantiated that increasing the effectiveness of joint decisions requires strengthening institutional interaction, developing stable consultation mechanisms and implementing multi-level diplomatic cooperation. In particular, the formation of joint strategic planning systems is of great importance, as it ensures earlier coordination of foreign policy priorities and reduces the risks of conflicts of interest. The proposed algorithm for improving coordination mechanisms allows structuring the interaction process from analytical assessment to monitoring results. Prospects for further research are related to an in-depth study of the transformation of coordination mechanisms in the context of

global challenges and an analysis of the impact of digital technologies on the processes of forming and implementing a common foreign policy in regional integration associations.

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