

Interstate Rivalries within Regional Organizations Case study: Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

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Abstract

Although the goal of all regional organizations is to strengthen cooperation between member states, in some cases there are apparent or hidden rivalries in minor or major levels, which sometimes leads to stagnation and inefficiency of the regional organization and hinders effective cooperation. The need for cooperation in South West Asia to benefit all developing countries in the region became the main driver for the foundation of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in 1985. This study aimed to identify the areas of rivalries among the member states of this organization resulting lack of cooperation and success, from a political geography and geopolitics point of view. Contexts of rivalries classified into four political, economic, cultural, and geopolitical factors containing eighteen sub-variables. The results showed geopolitical, political, cultural factors, and economic factors respectively have a positive and significant effect on rivalries in ECO.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Rivalry, Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO).

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1. Introduction

Cooperation and rivalry between countries is a very old issue among the countries of the world. Over time, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, factors such as the advancement of science, technology, communication, the increase of interdependence between countries led to the weakening of self-sufficiency and political, economic, social isolation among countries. As a result, the need for management and coordination of these matters and the avoidance of potential conflicts, cooperation and coordination for the development of common interests and solving transnational problems and mitigation of conflicts, led to the growth of international organizations. In various parts of the world, neighboring countries, taking into account the natural, human and economic factors and commonalities, have formed unions to strengthen inter-regional cooperation on various issues, so-called regional organizations. Although regional organizations are created with the intention of strengthening cooperation between members and apart from the fact that rivalry also has positive aspects, but in some cases there are negative hidden rivalries between member states due to various factors such as: differences between the nature of political systems and the ideology of states; Conflict of economic interests; Ethnic, racial and civilized rivalries; Intervention of transregional powers; and etc. As the intensity of rivalries increase, the existential philosophy of the regional organization may disappear and practically it become inefficient. Understanding the contexts of rivalries between members of a regional organization and determining the contribution of each underlying factors regional organization and determining the contribution of each factor, could enhance its prosperity and strengthens welfare, progress, peace, and coexistence in the region.

According to the Union of International Associations, the number of international organizations has increased from 213 to 73805 during 1909 to 2020, of which about 41000 cases are active. This means a growth of more than 34,550 percent over the past 110 years. In recent years, an average of 1200 international organizations have been established annually. Although many studies have been conducted on rivalries in the international system, regionalism and regional organizations, but little researches have been done on the contexts of rivalry within the regional organizations and among their member states. Given the growing number of regional organizations that are constantly growing, it seems necessary to address this issue. The present

study based on previous researchs is an attempt from the point of view of political and geopolitical geography in this field and in addition to classification of theoretical factors influencing rivalries between countries, specifically examines this issue among the member countries of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in southwest Asia the region that suffers from various difficulties like poverty, radicalism, violence, war etc. Although the organization was founded in 1985 and according to article II of its charter, promotion of trade among member countries through freer access to each other's markets, helping to boost global trade and efforts to eliminate unfair trade policies through the adoption of a common approach in the international community, are some its goals (Economic Cooperation Organization Secretariat,2017), but the percentage volume of intra ECO trade in different years was as follows: 1996 (8.6%), 2005 (6.5%) (Shahabi and Shikoleslami,2007:146),2013 (8.98%) and 2017 (8.98%). (http://eco.int/general_content/87003-Trade-Statistics.html?t=General-content).

One of indicators that used by experts to evaluate the performance of regional cooperation is the volume of intra-regional trade and this indicator can be a good measure to evaluate the success of such organisations in achieving predetermined goals. In evaluation of success of ECO, this fact cannot be ignored that what has been achieved, do not match with desires, visions and predictions of founders and other members of the organisation and also not proportionate with capacity and potentials of the region. It seems that rivalries between the member states of the organization is one of the major reasons of lack of success.

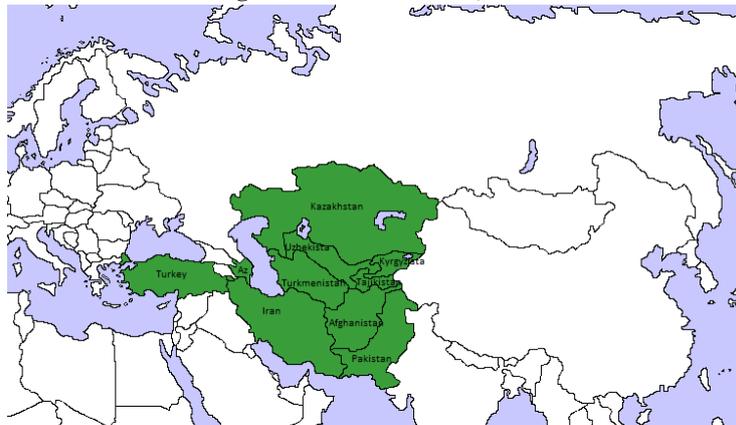
2. Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO)

Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) is an intergovernmental regional organisation that established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states. ECO is a heir of Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) which remained from 1964 to 1979 (Economic Cooperation Organization Secretariat, 2017). RCD was established to help the socioeconomic development of the member states based on historical, geographical and cultural ties. Domination bipolar system of international relations had an important impact on the creation and expansion of this organisation.

Because of Islamic revolution in Iran and changes of regional geopolitical system in 1979, this organisation was dissolved, but again in 1985, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey founded new organisation that emphasized on common geography, history and culture. ECO was established to promote multi dimensional regional cooperation with a view to provide conditions for sustainable socioeconomic growth in the member states.

In short time after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of republics of central Asia and Caucasus, because of long-standing cultural, religious and linguistic relations with Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, six of these republics; namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan along with Afghanistan became a member of ECO (Ibid).

Fig 1: Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) member states (Economic Cooperation Organization Secretariat, 2017)



3. Theoretical concepts

3.1. Competition and Rivalry

Competition is a fundamental concept in all areas of life, and very important topic in political, economic, social, artistic, educational and etc. It seems impossible to imagine a world without competition. This concept associated with arena of other living organisms and even plants. Competition arises when two or more organisms trying to gain a greater share of a limited resource, such as food, space and etc.

One of the most enduring interest in human societies is claimed and competition over control and management of land and resources. Individuals and interest groups at different levels are constantly competing with each other to expand their interests and seek to destabilize and change the existing order in favor of their own (Blacksell, 2006: 1). Human aspect of competition covers a wide range of subjects such as individual competitions, sports, politics, business and etc. Competition has different degrees and severity, also become multi-faceted and multi-dimensional concept in political, economic and social processes.

The word “rivalry” is generally used synonymously with competition; rivals are simply actors in competition with one another (Wankel,1972:427-437), whether at the individual (Katila and Chen,2008:593-625), or organisational levels (Porter,1980). Rivalry is ubiquitous whenever social beings interact. Animals rival for mating partners, siblings for the attention of their parents, politicians for re-election. Rivalry is, though, not restricted to the interpersonal level. It spills over to the group level: gangs rival for local hegemony, ethnicities for sovereignty, and parties for votes (Smith,1984: 248). Rivalry is thus studied in developmental and animal psychology, in social psychology and sociology, in administrative sciences and political science as well as in economics (Alcock,1984:293-294).

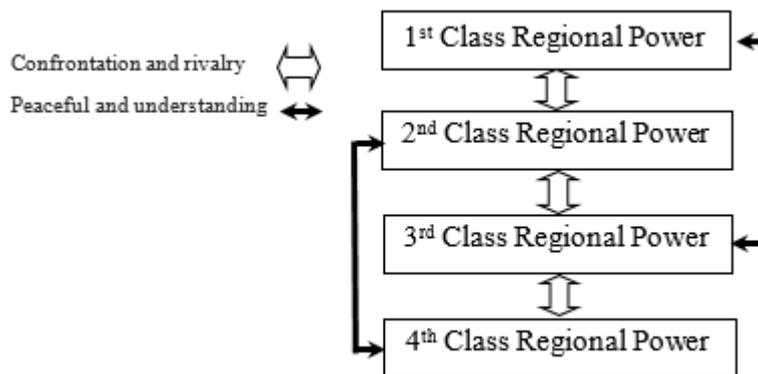
Rivalry is also ubiquitous in international relations: interstate rivalries such as the superpower rivalry of the Cold War, the India-Pakistan or the Near East rivalries are widely analyzed in the ‘enduring rivalries’ research program. Rivalries can be ordered hierarchically according to levels of analysis. In international relations, seven rivalry levels may be distinguished:

- ✓ The interpersonal level (e.g. rivalries of intermediaries in multiparty mediation);
- ✓ The group level (e.g. Ethnic conflicts);
- ✓ The bureaucratic level (e.g. Rivalries among armed services);
- ✓ The state level (e.g. Enduring rivalries);
- ✓ The organisational level (e.g. Inter-organisational rivalries);
- ✓ The regional level (e.g. The Middle East conflict); and
- ✓ The system level (e.g. The East-West conflict) (Biermann,2007).

Competition is everywhere, in nature and modern civilization alike, and thus has long been a topic of interest to researchers across the social sciences.

Prevailing theoretical models within management, economics, and psychology view competition in structural terms - as a situation in which the objective outcomes of actors are opposed to one another; that is, the actors are vying for the same scarce resources (Deutsch,1949:129–152). At the macro level, competition and rivalry between countries is an issue that has important consequences in the international system and sometimes causes serious disputes and wars. 75 percent of military disputes and 83 percent of wars between countries happened in the case of competition between them(Valeriano,2003:30). Some forms of rivalry in the international system are as follows: (1) rivalry between two or more par powers, such as global or regional powers; (2) rivalry between two powers, such as first and second class powers; (3) Interventional rivalry, this type of rivalry formed between powers in a specific territory or country based on conflicting interests (4) economic rivalry for market access and raw materials (Hafeznia,2006:370). Fig 2 shows the pattern of relations between regional powers.

Fig 2: Model of relations between regional powers



(Source: Hafeznia and Kavianirad, 2004: 105)

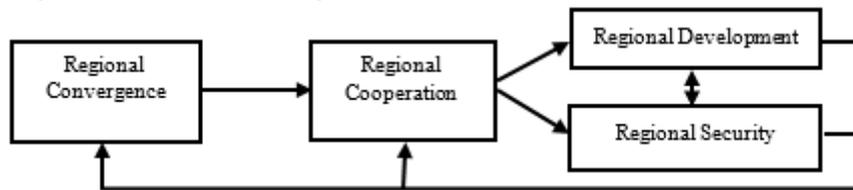
3.2. Regional Organisations

Although issues like cooperation, convergence, divergence and conflict have always been in international relations, but in recent decades' aspects and areas of these issues is far greater than in the past, because of advances in technologies and increasing mutual needs of countries. Increased interaction

between countries and need for managing, coordinating and solving the facing problems in this regard, justified need to create institutions at

different regional and international levels such as regional organisations (Fig 3 shows The role of regional integration in security and development). “Regional cooperation, as a middle path between complete self-reliance and complete openness, gives countries increased room to maneuver in pursuing development. Countries are showing increasing interest in forming regional groups to exploit the opportunities they offer for market expansion, creation of new industries, technology transfer and human resources development (UNESCAP,2004:26).

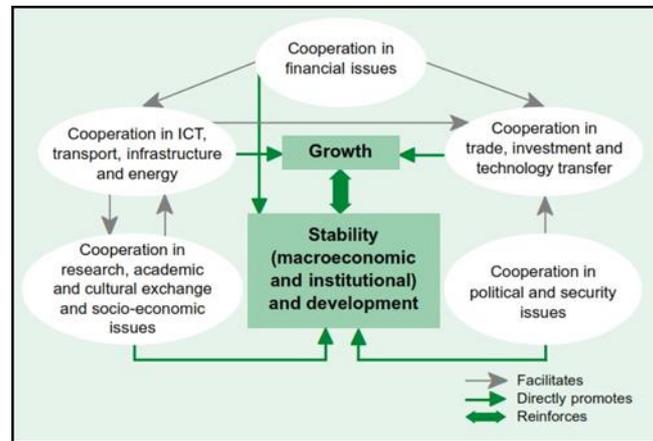
Fig 3: The role of regional integration in security and development



(Source: Hafeznia; Mokhtari Hashi and Eftekhari,2012:9)

Regional organisations, i.e., international institutions set up by and with the participation of neighboring countries, can help overcome obstacles to regional cooperation. They can provide a framework for building trust for dialogue and for negotiations; a platform for establishing credible rules of engagement and for the sharing of benefits and costs; a capacity for technical analysis of regional cooperative strategies and for their implementation; a vehicle for pooling or attracting financial resources to support investments in regional infrastructure or to compensate losers; and an instrument for monitoring the implementation of agreements and settling disputes that may arise (Linn, and Pidufala,2008:4).

Fig 4: Regional cooperation in different sectors and their inter-linkages



(Source: UNESCAP, 2004:26)

4. Research Method

At the first step through literature review and relevant theories, 4 factors containing 18 sub-variables identified as Table 1. In the second step to determine the amount of effect and the weight of each factor and variable, a 100 items questionnaire in 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1=No effect, 2= Minor effect, 3= Moderate effect, 4= High effect, 5= Very high effect was developed, then circulated among 150 respondents (75 academicians 75 official experts and specialists) in the fields of Political Geography, International Relations, Regional Studies, Economics and also officials that was familiar with the issues of regional organisations from Ministry Foreign Affairs, ECO headquarter and as well as experienced experts and managers of Iran Chamber of Commerce and ECO Chamber of Commerce. Finally, 130 questionnaires were received correctly.

For analyzing of data, SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 24.0 softwares used. To evaluate reliability of questionnaire for factor analysis, IBM SPSS 21.0 and Cronbach's Alpha, KMO¹, B.T²test are used. To evaluate the hypothesized factors, Equation Structural Modeling (AMOS) and Confirmatory Factor

1. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
2. Bartlett's test of sphericity

Analysis Method are used. Also the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation method was applied. A few assumptions need fulfilling in order to use the ML method: reasonable sample size; the scales of the observed variables are continuous; the hypothesized model is valid; and the distribution of the observed variables is multivariate normal. The data of this research had these criteria.

Table 1: Classification and explanation of geopolitical competition factors and variables in regional organisations

Factors	Variables	Explanation of variables
Political	Differences in political ideology	Differences in the political ideology of the political systems of member states of regional organisations lead to ideological competition and intensifying other aspects of competition.
	Type of political system	This variable includes various aspects such as ideological, nationalist and revolutionary, being undemocratic and authoritarian and also the instability of the political system.
	Membership motivations	Different membership motivations in regional organisations, such as increasing the sphere of influence, relying on regional organisations and even change in objectives and national priorities as a result of changes in the international system.
	Membership in overlapping regional organisations	Overlapping membership in different regional organisations, cause different and sometimes controversial obligations to each of regional organisations. In some cases competitive regional organisations trying to undermine each other.
	Nation-building process	Sense of confidence of countries is linked with the history of independence and pass or being at nation-building phase and these issues affect their behavior toward each other. This variable leads the isolationist behavior of countries and strength the fear of being dominated, so countries emphasis on their different aspects with other countries to strengthen the national feeling.
	Changes in international system conditions	Changes in the condition of the international system cause some alliances and more cooperation or discord and more competition among regional organisation member states.
Economic	Lack of economic complementary	The similarity of economic productions of member states of regional organisations, and weakness in economic complementary and having a single-product economy that lead to competition in market access.
	Types of economic systems	The difference in the economic systems of the member states of the regional organisation, from aspects such as trying to spread values of their economic systems and the dominance of the private or public sector in the economy.
	Shared resources	Shared resources among member states of regional organisations, the legal regime of shared resource exploitation and the diversity to use them.
	Economic development level and the size of economy	Significant difference in level of economic development through issues such as tendency of less developed countries for economic assistance from trans-regional countries and its consequences and labor flows. Significant difference in size of economy through issues such as the benefits and costs of regional organisations and intensification of

		inequality due to weak competitiveness of weak economies.
Cultural	Historical experience	Historical competing experiences and even common historical experiences of regional organisation member states (being part of united and integrated political unite in the past) can cause the fear of compromising their existence in case of close and free relationship.
	Civilizational belonging	In multi civilization regional organisations some of the member states that belong to a specific civilization create an informal union within regional organisations. Even in some cases there is hidden competition between the states belonging to a specific civilization block over which one is the core area of the civilization.
	Cultural diversity	Cultural diversity within and also between the member states of regional organisations through the issues such as religious prejudice, lack of cultural pluralism and differences in cultural values, weaken cooperation and increase competition.
	The number and distribution of minorities	The geographical distribution of minorities within the regional organisation member states and also the impact of global developments such as globalization on minorities.
Geopolitical	Interference of trans-regional powers	Interference of trans-regional powers in a region could lead to fragmentation and more competition among the member states of a regional organisation.
	Balance of power	In multi-polar regional organisations, there is an ongoing hidden competition to preserve the balance of power between the poles by trying to attract other members. In uni-polar regional organisations also there is an ongoing competition between different levels of power (for example, between level 1 and 2 or 2 and 3...). Also, some member States are trying to maintain balance of power by relying on trans-regional powers.
	Territorial and bordering issues	Issues related to territorial disputes, territorial claims, border rivers and performance issues of borders.
	Geographical location	Appropriate or inappropriate geographical location of regional organisation and its member states (for example being landlocked or not).

(Source: By the Author)

5. Results

5.1. Validity and Reliability of Measurement Model

The data collected from respondents on each factor was checked for reliability using IBM SPSS 21.0. The Cronbach’s Alpha computed for each variable were found to be higher than the desired value of 0.7 and are displayed in table 2 as below:

Table 2: Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability of the factors

	Cronbach’s Alpha	Number of items
Political Factor	.859	28
Economic Factor	.809	25
Cultural Factor	.783	20
Geopolitical Factor	.836	28
All Factors	.907	100

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy test was applied to test the adequacy of the sample. The results of KMO applied to the value of KMO for all factors were above 0.5 indicating that the adequacy of sample size and normality of data. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was applied and the results indicate that the selected variables correlation is significant in factor analysis. Table 3 shows the results of KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of the factors

	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	
		Approx. Chi-Square	Sig.
Political Factor	.874	608.780	.000
Economic Factor	.790	319.531	.000
Cultural Factor	.763	269.347	.000
Geopolitical Factor	.806	380.657	.000
All Factors	.897	2029.778	.000

5.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Geopolitical competition in ECO)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) explains the relationship between latent variables and measured variables. The second-order confirmatory factor analysis model of geopolitical competition in ECO was performed using 4 loaded latent Political, Economic, Cultural, and Geopolitical factors and 18 loaded observed variables, also the second-order CFA of Geopolitical competition in ECO was performed using AMOS 24.0 and the results are shown in Fig. 5.

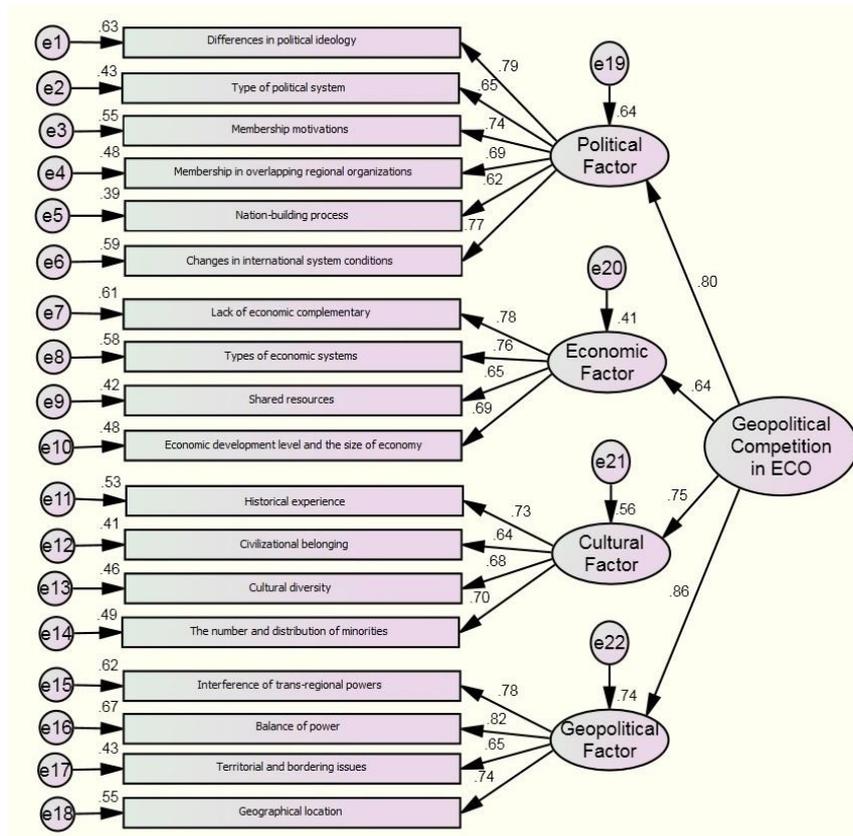
Table 4 provides the goodness of fit indices for the model, the results indicates that the fitness of the model very good. The Normed Chi-Square value is (CMIN/df = 1.98) is less than 2, indicating very good model fit. Comparative Fit Index (CFI= .933) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI=.922) are also higher than the standard level of 0.9, and indicates excellent model fit. Furthermore, Root Mean Squared Residual (RMR= 0.03) is close to zero, that indicates model fit is very good. Also the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is =.063, that is suggested to be less than the threshold of .07, that indicates model fit is very good. Additionally, the Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI= .749) and Parsimonious Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI=.799) are higher than the suggested value of .05. All these values suggest a good fit for the model.

Table 4: CFA Model Fit Indices of geopolitical competition in ECO

Model Fit Indices	indices	Value	Good Fit
Absolute Fit Indices	CMIN/df(χ^2 /df)	1.98 (260/131)	< 2
	Root Mean Squared Residual (RMR)	.031	close to zero
Comparative Fit Indices	Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	.922	0.9-1
	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	.933	> .9
Parsimonious Fit Indices	Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	.749	0.5-1
	Parsimonious Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI)	.799	0.5-1
	Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	.063	< .07

The results presented in Table 5 provides the values of regression paths, standardized regression weights, critical ratios (C.R), standard errors (S.E), probability values (p) and acceptance / rejection of hypotheses. The final tested model of the second-order CFA with the standardized factor weight is displayed in Fig. 5. The model shows a significant effect of the 4 factors on the Geopolitical Competition in ECO ($p < .050$).

Fig. 5: Second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Geopolitical Competition in ECO



5.3. Second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis ($\xi \leftarrow \eta$)

The results of the effect of endogenous latent variables (η) on exogenous latent variables (ξ) in table 5 show that political factor with a path coefficient of 0.798 and p-value > 0.05 (Sig= 0.000), economic factor with a path coefficient of 0.640 and p-value 0.000, cultural factor with a path coefficient of 0.747 and p-value 0.000, and geopolitical factor with a path coefficient of 0.859 and p-value 0.000 have positive and significant effect in geopolitical competition in ECO. Also the results showed that among the 4 factors, geopolitical factor has the greatest effect and economic factor has the least effect on geopolitical competition in ECO.

5.4. First-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis ($\eta \leftarrow \gamma$)

The effect of observed variables (γ) on exogenous latent variables (Political, Economic, Cultural and Geopolitical factors) is presented in Table 5. Results briefly explained as below:

In Political factor: all 6 variables have high regression weights, as well as positive and significant effect ($p < .000$). Differences in political ideology variable with regression coefficients of 0.794 and Changes in international system conditions variable with regression coefficients of 0.768 are the highest effective variables. Nation-building process variable with regression coefficients of 0.624 is the least effective variable.

In Economic factor: Results show observed variables have strong loadings on the economic factor. The standardized loading for Lack of economic complementary variable is .781; for Types of economic systems variable is .762; for Shared resources variable is .643 and for Economic development level and the size of economy variable is .693. Also the effect of observed variability is significant ($p > .000$).

In Cultural factor: effect of observed variable is significant ($p > .000$). Observed variables of Historical experience with regression coefficients of .727 and $p < .000$ and Civilizational belonging variable with regression coefficients of 0.641 and $p < .000$ respectively, have the highest and the least effective variables.

In Geopolitical factor: Results indicate the strong and positive effect of observed variables of Interference of trans-regional powers ($R^2 = .785$; $p < .000$), Balance of power ($R^2 = .818$; $p < .000$), Territorial and bordering

issues ($R^2 = .655$; $p < .000$), and Geographical location ($R^2 = .740$; $p < .000$) on geopolitical factor.

In general, results showed geopolitical factor and its sub-variable (Balance of power) has the most effect on geopolitical competition in the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO).

Table 5. Regression Weights of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Geopolitical Competition in ECO

		R2		S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Final remarks
Political Factor	<--- Geopolitical Competition	1.000	.798^b				accepted
Differences in political ideology	<--- Political Factor	.997	.794	.077	12.886	***	accepted
Type of political system	<--- Political Factor	.825	.655	.084	9.825	***	accepted
Membership motivations	<--- Political Factor	.973	.743	.082	11.881	***	accepted
Membership in overlapping regional organisations	<--- Political Factor	.814	.692	.075	10.857	***	accepted
Nation-building process	<--- Political Factor	.494	.624	.053	9.388	***	accepted
Changes in international system conditions	<--- Political Factor	1.000	.768 ^b				accepted
Economic Factor	<--- Geopolitical Competition	.746	.640	.105	7.125	***	accepted
Lack of economic complementary	<--- Economic Factor	1.000	.781 ^b				accepted
Types of economic systems	<--- Economic Factor	.786	.760	.069	11.373	***	accepted
Shared resources	<--- Economic Factor	.733	.647	.076	9.629	***	accepted
Economic development level and the size of economy	<--- Economic Factor	.822	.693	.081	10.093	***	accepted
Cultural Factor	<--- Geopolitical Competition	.893	.747	.121	7.373	***	accepted
Historical experience	<--- Cultural Factor	.826	.727	.086	9.629	***	accepted
Civilizational belonging	<--- Cultural Factor	.913	.641	.107	8.489	***	accepted
Cultural diversity	<--- Cultural Factor	.890	.681	.101	8.840	***	accepted
The number and distribution of minorities	<--- Cultural Factor	1.000	.699 ^b				accepted
Geopolitical Factor	<--- Geopolitical Competition	.976	.859	.124	7.871	***	accepted
Interference of trans-regional powers	<--- Geopolitical Factor	.889	.785	.075	11.880	***	accepted
Balance of power	<--- Geopolitical Factor	1.124	.818	.093	12.026	***	accepted
Territorial and bordering issues	<--- Geopolitical Factor	.943	.655	.097	9.714	***	accepted
Geographical location	<--- Geopolitical Factor	1.000	.740 ^b				accepted
b-The critical ratio is not available, because the regression weight of the first component factor is fixed at 1.							

6. Conclusion

Cooperation and confrontation have always been in international relations, but nowadays, due to the increased interaction between countries, aspects of these issues are far more than before. To manage and resolved such increasing issues various types of institutions such as regional organisations are created. Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) despite over 3 decades of its life, according to published documents, reports, books and articles, has not been successful. It seems that one of the decisive factors of inefficiency and failure of ECO linked to geopolitical competition among its member states.

To investigate this issue, factors and variables of geopolitical competition were identified, including 4 factors and 18 sub-variables. To determine the effect of each factor and variables in geopolitical competition in ECO, Confirmatory Factor Analysis Method using AMOS software applied and the results showed a significant and positive effect of the 4 factors: Geopolitical factor with $\beta = .859$ and $p < .000$; Political factor with $\beta = .798$ and $p < .000$; Cultural factor with $\beta = .747$ and $p < .000$ and economic factor with $\beta = .640$ and $p < .000$; it means that all 4 hypotheses are supported. In general, based on the research findings, among the 4 factors, Geopolitical factor and among the 18 observed variables, Balance of power has the highest effect on geopolitical competition in ECO.

7. Acknowledgment

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